

In the Face of *Industri*: Alternative Populisms in Indonesian *Musik kontemporer*

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Abstract

Indonesian *musik kontemporer* (contemporary art music) has been contradistinguished from pop since its beginnings in the 1970s. The senior figures who directed the institutions through which *musik kontemporer* developed spoke, in terms reminiscent of Adorno, of the need to counter the flood of commercialized popular culture, whether foreign or indigenous. However, both the work and the discourse of the composers who emerged from these institutions increasingly demonstrate a more complex response. Djaduk Ferianto engages with “*industri*,” both as a source of subsidy for more “*idealis*” work and as a model to learn from. For others, *industri* remains anathema, yet many of them have also turned in more populist directions. Yasudah practices “mixophony,” a combination of “explorophony” and “beatophony.” Wayan Sadra jams with an eclectic group of young musicians, while continuing rebellious gestures such as dragging gongs on the floor. Sutanto has all but abandoned urban concertizing in favor of developing folk arts with Javanese villagers. Iwan Hasan has sought refuge in progressive rock from the money-oriented classical and jazz scenes in Jakarta. Concern about the dominance of commercialism has thus become key to Western-oriented and traditionally-based Indonesian composers alike, cutting across and even eclipsing previously preoccupying dichotomies of modern/traditional and foreign/indigenous. But rather than eschew popularity, they seek alternative populisms, along with alternative measures of artistic legitimacy as that of Western classical and Javanese court traditions wane. The ties of artistic value to genre have been loosened, making *musik kontemporer* more resilient, if harder to define.

Bruno Nettl once suggested that the “intensive imposition of Western music and musical thought upon the rest of the world” was “the most significant phenomenon in the global history of music” (1985:3). At least as significant, in the West no less than anywhere else, is the *industrialization* and commercialization of music. The majority of music most the world encounters today comes to us by way of the music industry—referring first and foremost to the conglomeration of companies whose business is the production and dissemination of music through broadcasts and recordings. And the majority of that music, in most places, is what we would call popular music. This is certainly the case in North America. It is also the case in most of Indonesia.

My paper is not about pop or the music industry in Indonesia per se. Rather, it is a survey of some of the attitudes held and directions taken in the face of *industri* on the part of those involved in *musik kontemporer*, or contemporary art music. The term *industri* is commonly used as a label for both the infrastructure of mass cultural production and the kind of culture it typically produces. I start by examining the perspectives of two senior figures responsible for carving a niche for *musik kontemporer* in a field dominated by commercialized popular culture. I then move to a series of case studies of artists who respond in diverse ways to the marginalized status of their endeavor. Finally, I offer some suggestions as to what all of this might mean to the future of *musik kontemporer*.

Senior Figures

Suka Hardjana played a key role in shaping the profile of *musik kontemporer* through directing the Pekan Komponis, an annual festival featuring new works by both Western-oriented and traditionally-based Indonesian composers started in 1979.¹ Having established a career as a classical clarinetist in Germany before returning to his native Indonesia to help build a classical music scene there, Hardjana is a prime example of the phenomenon identified by Nettl. It is not surprising, then, that Hardjana takes the presence of Western music in Indonesia as a given, rather than viewing it as an imposition. What troubles him is the dominance of commercial music activity. He eventually developed a sharp analysis of the alienated state of Western-oriented music in Indonesia, but in the 1970s and 80s, the period in which *musik kontemporer* took shape, his complaints were more blunt. Indonesian music was all commerce, the mass media provided only poison, and what was needed was art.²

Similar views were held by Gendhon Humardani, who as the director of ASKI,³ the academy for traditional arts in Solo, contributed equally to *musik kontemporer*'s

¹ See the compilation of documentation of the first six Pekan Komponis meetings edited by Hardjana (1986).

² Hardjana made the first charge in a 1980 lecture entitled "Some Problems with Creativity in Indonesian Music in the Present," delivered at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center in Jakarta on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of one of the center's governing bodies. *Kompas* (1980) was one of three daily papers that reported on the lecture. The second charge is from one of several interviews with the Indonesian press in 1976, in connection with a performance of Ensemble Jakarta. Hardjana formed this ensemble as a string orchestra in 1971; by 1976 it was reduced to a clarinet quintet as most members had quit to pursue more lucrative activities (Angkatan Bersenjata 1976). Hardjana's attitudes thus have much to do with his frustration in trying to build a classical music scene.

³ With advancements in the level of degree offered, Indonesian educational institutions change their names. The arts academy in Solo, or Surakarta, began as ASKI (*Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia*, Indonesian Academy of Javanese Performing Arts), became STSI (*Sekolah Tinggi*

development. Humardani's mission was to make traditional Indonesian arts relevant for the present age. He was by no means alone in this effort: alongside conservative traditionalists there were bold innovators who readily responded to the realities of an urbanizing and modernizing society. This latter group was changing the face of traditional art, but in pursuing a popular audience Humardani felt they compromised its essential nature. Humardani's criticism was often shrill. He dismissed the spectacular dance drama style pioneered at Prambanan⁴ as idiotic and "kitsch" (Humardani 1981:257-258) and decried the "pop" style gamelan creations of Nartosabdho, the most prominent shadow-puppeteer of the 1960s and 70s. Humardani instead took modern Indonesian visual art and literature as his models, and created at ASKI a sort of laboratory where young artists were encouraged to experiment without concerning themselves with how their work might be received by society at large.⁵

There are, then, clear parallels between Indonesia and the West as far as how contemporary art music has positioned itself in relationship to more dominant cultural currents. But there are also significant differences. *Musik kontemporer* has never been as comfortably sequestered as certain modernist strains of Western new music. The interventions overseen by figures like Hardjana and Humardani came too late, and could only go so far. ASKI Solo provides traditionally-based composers with an institutional base which is secure, but that remains an extremely isolated island in a culture where the idea of Art as a specialized and autonomous realm of aesthetic experience has yet to take hold. This idea of art has a greater following in Jakarta—though even there, where the classical music scene is dominated by pops orchestras, it plays second fiddle to the appetite for entertainment. Compounded by the lack of a secure and supportive institutional base such as ASKI, Western-oriented composers have been forced to reckon with the precariousness of their enterprise. In the West, the gulf that contemporary art music established between itself and popular culture made the question of boundaries a non-issue, until it was problematized by postmodern composers uncomfortable with modern music's isolation. Indonesian composers have enjoyed no such luxury. But neither have they suffered from the siege mentality of Western new music composers so acutely critiqued by Susan McClary (1989). Indonesian composers of *musik kontemporer* have instead from the outset demonstrated a more varied and complex response to their predicament.

Seni Indonesia, Indonesian College of Arts) in 1988, and ISI (*Institut Seni Indonesia*, Indonesian Institute of Arts) in 2006.

⁴ See Lim (1997) for an account of the development of this form, known as *sendratari*, an initialism formed from the words *seni* (art), *drama*, and *tari* (dance).

⁵ See the biography of Humardani (1990) and history of the development of gamelan kontemporer in Solo (1991) by Rustopo, a student of Humardani's and now a senior faculty member of ISI Solo.

Case Studies

Turning now to my case studies, I start with three examples that skirt the boundary between *musik kontemporer* and *industri*. Iwan Hasan, a younger Jakarta-based composer who studied classical guitar, jazz, and composition in the United States, temporarily gave up music after returning to Indonesia out of frustration at the lack of interest in the more “serious direction” he wanted to pursue. Several opportunities got him back into music, including participation in the 1998 Pekan Komponis—the first after a ten year hiatus. He would like to do more work in an art music context, and is hopeful that the one classically-focused Indonesian orchestra will finally perform a piece of his that the board had previously refused. But meanwhile, Hasan has found a more reliable and sustaining vehicle for his artistic aspirations: the progressive rock group Discus. The second album by the group has enjoyed distribution in Indonesia by Sony, thanks in part to the lobbying efforts of fans of “progressive” music. They were declared the “The Best Progressive Band” at the 2004 Anugerah Muzik Indonesia, the Indonesian equivalent of The Grammy Awards (Gedung Kesenian Jakarta 2005). By these measures at least, the group has been successful in the terms of *industri*.

The following clips are from one single nine-minute song.

[audio-visual example 1]

My second example, Djaduk Ferianto, is one of the most prominent figures in the traditionally-based *musik kontemporer* scene in Jogja. Djaduk emerged from the private studio of his father, the noted choreographer and impresario Bagong Kussudiardja.⁶ Bagong’s early work, shaped by studies with Martha Graham, was decidedly modernist, but he made his career producing more populist amalgams of regional dance traditions for national events, government sponsored cultural missions, and his network of dance schools. Djaduk inherited from his father this rather pragmatic and somewhat populist approach, and has actively sought out involvement in *industri*. In the late 1990s Djaduk and members of his group Kua Etnika participated in the TV series Dua Warna, (Two Colors), in which they collaborated with Indonesian jazz and pop musicians. On the eve of the 2004 general election, they backed up presidential and vice-presidential candidates as they sang on a talk-show style special. Djaduk speaks of this activity in terms of the *realistis* (the realistic) subsidizing the *idealis* (the idealistic)—that is, Kua Etnika’s self-produced concerts and recordings. But he also speaks of learning from *industri*. Kua Etnika’s posters sport the logos of their cigarette company sponsors, and they apply pop-style production values to both their CDs and concerts. The packaging seems to fit the

⁶ Murgiyanto’s (1991) study of contemporary Indonesian dance includes a chapter on Bagong Kussudiardja.

product, Djaduk conveniently having a genuine penchant for short melodies and riffs, and accessibly novel fusions of traditional instruments with synthesizers.

As a point of comparison, my third example is the band Krakatau, which has moved away from the mainstream of *industri* towards the same point on the boundary that Kua Etnika has approached from the *kontemporer* side. For its first decade Krakatau was highly successful playing pop songs in the light fusion style which defines Indonesian jazz. Sales of their first five albums averaged around half a million copies each. Growing artistically dissatisfied, in the 1990s Krakatau's founders Dwiki Darmawan and Pra Budi Dharma began to incorporate elements of traditional Sundanese music, and eventually reformulated the group to include traditional musicians. Their first album in this configuration, *Mystical Mist*, sold only 44,000 copies, or 10% of what they used to sell. And whereas before they were routinely nominated for music awards, they now no longer fit any of the categories, and have effectively, in Dwiki's words, been thrown out of the *industri* world.

[audio-visual examples 2 and 3]

Turning to a truly alternative populism, my next example is part of a growing trend in Indonesia, in which urban artists from various disciplines collaborate with communities in sometimes quite remote rural locations. Several *musik kontemporer* composers have done this, but the most striking case is Sutanto "Mendut." Sutanto was one of the more promising composers to come out of the Western music academy in Jogja in the mid-1970s. He dropped out of music and for a time disappeared from the contemporary arts scene. When he resurfaced in the late 80s, he was living in the village of Mendut (hence his name) using theater "as a medium for community development" (Notosudirdjo 2001:349-350). He extended this work to more remote villages high up on the slopes of the volcanoes in the region, and in 2002 organized the first of an ongoing series of "Java-wide mountain community festivals" (Sutanto 2007). Although he has become "disaffected with the dominant urban arts bureaucracy" (2007), he has not entirely disengaged from the *kontemporer* network. He presented a "happening" involving villagers from Mendut at a major contemporary arts festival in Solo in 1994,⁷ and *kontemporer* artists from all across Java travel to the festivals he organizes. The following clip is of one of these mountain village groups at an event in Jakarta organized by NGOs working with the urban poor.

⁷ I participated in this performance, described by Notosudirdjo (2001:352).

[audio-visual example 4]

My final two examples incorporate elements of pop music, but involve little or no attempt to engage with *industri*. Wayan Sadra is a Balinese composer who because of a reputation for being unconventional was recruited by Humardani to study at and then join the faculty of ASKI Solo. His pieces have featured the dragging of gongs on the floor and the breaking of eggs, most recently by throwing them at a 9-by-12-foot griddle cum canvas. Without abandoning these conspicuously rebellious gestures, Sadra has started moving in a different and more subtly subversive direction. At a faculty presentation in 2000, Sadra organized a jam session which started with a short jembe solo, soon joined by other unpitched percussion and Sadra proclaiming “*Agak pop! Ini namanya agak pop!*” (Kind of pop! This is what you call kind of pop!) Building on this, Sadra formed an avant-garde jam band with a motley group of students, graduates, and one drop-out, playing whatever they play, which includes rock and *kroncong* instruments as well as a random assortment of traditional instruments, Indonesian and otherwise. The level of musicianship varies, with priority placed instead on the willingness to contribute to a collaborative compositional process.

[audio-visual example 5]

Yasudah, like Tony Prabowo, Otto Sidartha, and other leading figures in the Jakarta-based Western-oriented scene, was a student of Slamet Abdul Sjukur—the “father” of *musik kontemporer* (Mack 2004:197-198), who returned to Indonesia in 1976 after fourteen years in Paris.⁸ Like Iwan Hasan and Sutanto, Yasudah gave up music for a while. He restarted after moving back to where he grew up: Baluwarti, the neighborhood within the outer walls of the court in Solo. Despite his proximity to this center of high Javanese culture, Yasudah never learned to play gamelan. However, a current principal project reflects in equal measure his youthful interest in radio broadcasts of *wayang orang* (a form in which actor-dancers enact shadow-puppet stories), rock bands like Deep Purple, and exposure to the full gamut of Western avant-garde music. This is his band Sarang Damelan, featuring multiple vocalists going between poppy melodies and theatrical dialogues to the accompaniment of invented and pop instruments, most prominently an electronic keyboard affectionately named “*Kanjeng Kyai Khotak Jedhung*” (His Venerable Highness Green Caterpillar Box).

⁸ For a more extensive profile of Slamet Abdul Sjukur, see Mack (2005).

[audio-visual example 6]

Yasudah's project is an example of "*mixophony*," a half-way point between "*beatophony*" and "*explorophony*," two other terms in an inclusive five-part scheme he developed as an escape from the polemical and endless debate over how to define *musik kontemporer*. By way of conclusion, I turn now to this debate, one fueled and complicated by the activity I have just surveyed, but perhaps inevitable, given the varied backgrounds of the composers and scenes which constitute *musik kontemporer*. The debate is not, however, primarily about the Western-oriented versus the traditionally-based, thanks to the inclusivity established early on by the Pekan Komponis. More fundamentally, it arises from conflicting notions of artistic legitimacy. There is in Indonesia something parallel to the competing economies of music that operate in the West: one measured by commercial success, the other by prestige. Djaduk Ferianto thus complains of the a priori rejection by those involved in *musik kontemporer* of that which has anything to do with *industri*. This attitude is in part a legacy of Hardjana's and Humardani's antipathy towards commercialized popular culture. But the economy of prestige in Indonesia is too small to support a truly exclusive elitism. Even the epitome of the Western-oriented Indonesian composer, Tony Prabowo, who identifies with the high modernism of Schoenberg, Webern, and Boulez, readily acknowledges his interest in prog rock, and is quite enthusiastic about Iwan Hasan's band Discus. There does exist a wariness of *industri* and a sense that true artistic integrity is incompatible with commercial success—an assessment that Krakatau's experience suggests is not unfounded. But this has not stopped composers such as Sadra and Yasudah from actively engaging with aspects of popular music genres. They do so both out of artistic interest and as a means of broadening their socio-aesthetic base, forging alternative populisms parallel to that pursued by Sutanto, and inspired by similar concerns.

Sadra once noted that the word *kontemporer* is not a noun, but an adjective. Its use as such may well increase as the ties of artistic value to genre and musical tradition are further loosened. *Musik kontemporer* may become even harder to define, but for these composers it is a worthwhile gambit if it means that it's also more resilient.

References

The case studies in this paper are based primarily on interviews and field research conducted in Indonesia in 2000, 2004, and 2005.

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2007 Abstract for paper presentation, "The Wild Dream of Mountain Community Art." www.asiapacificfestival.org.nz/conference/speakers-abstracts.html, accessed July 1.

Audio-Visual Component

The paper was accompanied by slide presentation (prepared using the software Keynote), providing the following summary profiles of the individuals discussed. The text was as follows:

Senior Figures:

Suka Hardjana

Classically trained musician, director of the Pekan Komponis (Composers Festival), 1979-1988

Gendhon Humardani

Director of ASKI (Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia), the traditional arts academy in Solo

Case Studies:

Iwan Hasan

Trained in the USA, based in Jakarta. Found refuge in *industri* with his progressive rock band Discus.

Djaduk Ferianto

Javanese composer, son of modernist-turned-populist choreographer Bagong Kussudiardja, engages in *industri* with his group Kua Etnika.

Krakatau

Jazz-Sundanese fusion group led by Dwiki Darmawan and Pra Budi Dharma, "thrown out" of *industri*.

Sutanto "Mendut"

Western-trained composer working with remote village communities; a truly alternative populism.

Wayan Sadra

Balinese composer on faculty at art academy in Solo, leads the avant-garde jam band Sono Seni.

Yasudah

Western-trained in Jakarta, returned to home neighborhood in Solo, inspired by rock, *wayang orang*, and the avant-garde.

The slide presentation also incorporated photographs of the artists discussed, and excerpts from the following audio and video recordings (listed in the order they were presented):

1. Iwan Hasan

"System Manipulation" from the album "...tot licht!" by Discus. Intrepid Music, 513738.2, 2003.

2. Djaduk Ferianto

“Kupu Tarang” from the album “Unen-Unen” by Kua Etnika. Self-produced CD, 2004.

3. Krakatau

“Mystical Mist” from the album “Mystical Mist.” Aquarius APC AQM 16-2, 1994.

4. Sutanto

Performance by an unidentified group at a cultural night organized by Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Slum Dwellers International, and Urban Poor Linkage Indonesia, in Jakarta, 19 September 2002. Video documentation by Afrizal Malna for Urbanpoor Media.

5. Wayan Sadra

Unidentified piece from audio documentation of a performance by Sono Seni, circa 2003. CDR copy obtained from members of Sono Seni.

6. Yasudah

“Matur Nuwun” from the album “DI-ET? NO!” by S. Yasudah and Sarang Damelan. Self-produced cassette, circa 1999.