

“Allegro di Krontjong”:
Life and Works of Amir Pasaribu

by

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Introduction

An Encounter

One Sunday in 2006, the young composer and his friend knocked on the door of a house in Medan, Indonesia. No answer. When they were about to leave, the door slowly wobbled open. “Who?” asked an old man in *sarong*, sitting on a wheelchair. He was hard of hearing, and the young guest had to repeatedly yell his name into the old man’s ear. Upon recognizing Ananda Sukarlan, an Indonesian pianist and composer who devotedly performs his pieces on international stages, Amir Pasaribu’s sternness of expression melted; his face lit up with happiness. He exclaimed, in Dutch, “*Ik ken jouw naam* (I know your name)!”

Sukarlan, who has been based in Europe since he graduated from the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Netherlands in 1997, received Amir Pasaribu’s address in an email from Nurman, Pasaribu’s son who lived in the Netherlands. Nurman suggested that Sukarlan just come by without calling, as Pasaribu lived by himself, was already wheelchair-bound and did not go anywhere anymore. He would enjoy getting a visit, especially from Sukarlan, whose name he mentioned often.

Pasaribu, it seemed, was more comfortable conversing in Dutch, and Sukarlan followed suit. In the conversation between two Indonesian composers, several names in the Indonesian music sphere were mentioned. Sukarlan had to break the news to Pasaribu that the Indonesian pianist Rudy Laban had passed away two years earlier. Pasaribu frowned and mentioned that Laban was “so young.” Pasaribu, who suffered from Alzheimer, also remembered the death of “Tisna,” Mrs. Charlotte Sutisna, a

Dutch pianist and graduate of the Amsterdam Conservatory who, in the 1950s, performed Pasaribu's compositions for the Indonesian national radio. Pasaribu told Sukarlan about the sorrow that comes with a long life—that one has to endure the loneliness following the death of your closest friends. The worst of such loss for Pasaribu, however, had to be the death of his wife Siti Noerana and son Iwan in 1980 in Suriname, a loss that, according to his granddaughter Gonny, hit Pasaribu so hard that he was never able to compose anymore.¹

Before he got in contact with Nurman, Sukarlan admitted, he always thought Pasaribu had passed away and joined Bach, Beethoven, and his other favorite composers in what he called the “Dead Composers Society.”² It was not Sukarlan's fault. While Pasaribu had lived a long life, he liked to keep it private. Among the few acknowledged musicians, composers, and music scholars in twentieth century Indonesian history, Amir Pasaribu was not only one with the highest accomplishments, but also the one with the boldest voice, constantly voicing his opinions through essays and magazines. He left Indonesia in 1968 following an argument with the head of the National Radio, which resulted in Pasaribu's termination, and a ban on the performance of his works. After his resentful departure from Indonesia, his popularity dwindled even among classical music circles, and of those who had heard of him, not many knew of his final return to the homeland after almost three decades abroad. As soon as he stopped expressing his mind through writing and composing, his life became shrouded with mystery.

¹ Gonny Pasaribu, “Pengantar,” liner notes to *Piano Works of Amir Pasaribu*, Ananda Sukarlan, Chendra Panatan CD, 2007.

² Ananda Sukarlan, “Bersua Dengan Amir Pasaribu,” Andy Skyblogger's Log, 3 Feb. 2009, <http://andystarblogger.blogspot.com/2009/02/bersua-dengan-amir-pasaribu.html>.

Conversing on the terrace with many guests who came and went, including his granddaughter Gonny, nephew Ben, ethnomusicologist Franki Raden, biographer Eritha Sitorus, occasional news reporters, and now Sukarlan, Pasaribu seemed to be rather bitter talking about certain events in his past.³ He advised Sukarlan to “*blijf buitenland*” (Dutch: ‘stay abroad’), because local artists are still not appreciated in Indonesia. When Sukarlan showed the twenty five piano compositions by Pasaribu that he had acquired from multiple sources, Pasaribu commented that there were many more. But where they are, Pasaribu continued, no one knows, “just forget about it.” Pasaribu moved between places numerous times in the past, and some pieces might have been misplaced. Once, a burglar came in his house and, perhaps without knowing what they were, took some important documents. The old composer seemed to have put his compositions, along with his composing days, in the distant past.

Sukarlan wrote a detailed account of the meeting in his blog, ending it with a reflection that he could not “just forget about” the many manuscripts that are missing—it had left him with so much regret. He first played Pasaribu’s music in the eighties, when he was a piano student in Jakarta. Upon acquiring some of Pasaribu’s original manuscripts from Pasaribu’s son in 2000, he noticed many incorrect details, including repetitions and time signatures, in the newer version he used to read. He had since then gotten rid of the newer versions, and stuck to performing Pasaribu’s music according to the original, handwritten manuscripts.⁴ In that 2006 meeting, Sukarlan acquired the long-desired consent to record some of Pasaribu’s piano pieces, which he completed in 2007 in the Hall of Conservatorio de Amanuel, Madrid. The

³ Gonny Pasaribu, “Pengantar”.

⁴ Ananda Sukarlan, e-mail to the author, January 24, 2012.

album, produced and distributed in Indonesia by his management, is titled “Piano Works of Amir Pasaribu”. Unfortunately, after the initial meeting Sukarlan never had the chance to meet Pasaribu again.

The Forgotten Pioneer

Many contemporary Indonesian composers call Amir Pasaribu the “pioneer of modern Indonesian music.” Elaborating this notion of “pioneerism”, Sukarlan commented:

What he has done was entering new territories of music where no man in Indonesia had gone before. He was the first Indonesian composer who explored the polytonality, polyrhythm, new scales and modes, etc. ... He was the first to apply those techniques to music that has an Indonesian character; ... Pasaribu had established a new sound, only possible to be written by an Indonesian composer.⁵

In his younger years, Sukarlan admitted, he learned much from Pasaribu about how to shape the “Indonesian-ness” of his compositions through the use of pentatonic modes and folk rhythms and creative incorporation of traditional folk songs in modern compositions. Though not directly influenced in terms of musical technique, composer and pianist Jaya Suprana (b.1949) spiritually regards Pasaribu as a teacher; one that strengthened his confidence in creating music.⁶

In the context of twentieth century Indonesia, then a newly established nation that went through many dramatic changes in all aspects, Pasaribu’s significance lies in his unique approaches to the polemics surrounding Indonesia’s national cultural identity, particularly on the issue of how Western influence was positioned and

⁵ Ananda Sukarlan, “Amir Pasaribu: a brief encounter,” Andy Skyblogger’s Log, 16 Feb. 2010, <http://andystarblogger.blogspot.com/2010/02/amir-pasaribu-brief-encounter.html>

⁶ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, “Amir, Sang Maestro,” *TEMPO*, February 15, 2009, 53-63.

incorporated in the national culture. His critical insights about the Indonesian culture remain relevant today, and his compositions captured and responded to the situation in a unique way. Through his life and his ideas, he advocated that local and international cultures, as well as traditional and modern values, could coexist.

In this thesis, I will review the biography of Amir Pasaribu and his role in Indonesia's dynamic musical culture in the twentieth century, as well as present a brief musical analysis of his piano compositions. In writing his biography, I would like to acknowledge the important efforts of Eritha Rohana Sitorus in writing the first biography of Amir Pasaribu, on which I have based much of the knowledge in the current text. The many interviews Sitorus conducted with Pasaribu contained much information about Pasaribu's life that was not found anywhere else, and otherwise would never be known.

Chapter I

Biographical Overview

The life story of Amir Hamzah Pasaribu is one of self-determination, perseverance, and dedication. His granddaughter Gonny Pasaribu described him with the Dutch word *eigzinnig*, meaning obstinate or self-opinionated, “not in the sense of him being stubborn or self-willed, as some English translations would have it, but more in terms of him always wanting to follow his own path in life and never opting for the easy way out.”¹ Pasaribu knew the value of education, and it was translated into passion, both to pursue the highest education as a musician and scholar, and to establish the benchmarks for music education in Indonesia. In many news articles from the past and present, he was consistently described as a serious person with a very strong character. As an essayist, he was sharp, straightforward, and uncompromising in his opinions. His expertise in, and infatuation with, Western classical music often got him mistaken for being too highbrow and westernized. His compositions and essays, on the other hand, also proved that he was a nationalist, truly concerned with the cultural issues in the society, and charmed by the beauty of Indonesia’s diverse local traditions.

Early Years

Amir Pasaribu, was born in Siborong-Borong, a small north Sumatran village on May 21, 1915. The land surrounding Lake Toba, commonly called *Tanah Batak*

¹ Gonny Pasaribu, “Pengantar”, liner notes to *Piano Works of Amir Pasaribu*, Ananda Sukarlan, Chendra Panatan CD, 2007.

(Batak Land), is inhabited predominantly by people of Bataknese ethnicity. Most were commonly farmers and coffee-growers, but there were some exceptions: Amir's father, Mangaraja Salomon Pasaribu,² for example, was a *asisten wedana*, assistant to the district chief, under the Dutch East Indies government. At the time, Indonesia had been colonized for well over 300 years. Local efforts that had begun in 1841 to oust colonialism from Tanah Batak fell through, and by 1883 the entire land was conquered by the Dutch. By the decree of Queen Wilhelmina in 1901, the Netherlands admitted ethical responsibility for the welfare of its colonial subjects, a policy known as the Dutch Ethical Policy. It entailed duties to spur development in three main areas: irrigation, immigration, and education, and the latter resulted in the building of many primary and secondary schools in Tanah Batak, all using Dutch as the language of instruction.

Born into a *priyayi* class, one of high social status, Amir Pasaribu and his siblings were privileged to attend one of such schools. He started his primary education in a *Hollandisch-Inlandische School* (HIS), boarding school for locals, located in Narumonda. Pasaribu was bigger than most of his friends and had a big appetite, and thus it was hard for him to adjust to the boarding school food. He expressed discontent over the poor food quality, and persuaded his friends to sneak out of the boarding school ground. Being the one with the most pocket money, he bought everyone food and facilitated the getaway. The school found out and he was expelled in third grade. Without a transfer letter, he was unable to attend any other HIS schools in the region. Luckily, an acquaintance of his older brother was able to

² The last name "Pasaribu" is a family name not only unique to Mangaraja Pasaribu's family, but rather quite a common *Marga*, or "clan name", in the Bataknese culture. One *marga* can be owned by many families that are not directly related.

help him enroll in the *Europeese Lagere School*, an elementary school for Dutch nationals, in Padang, West Sumatra. The whole school only had three local students.

One afternoon, Pasaribu was sitting on the porch, listening to piano and violin music from inside the hall. The Dutch friar Justisianus spotted him, and seeing Pasaribu's high interest in music, offered to teach him violin. The young boy not only changed his perception of himself as a "bad" student, but also started his formal musical training. He rigorously practiced violin and piano in the afternoons, sometimes until late at night.

Music had a ubiquitous presence both in the Batak culture and in the Pasaribu family. Mangaraja Pasaribu was said to have written a book, in Bataknese, about the origin of *Gondang Batak* music. He owned a gramophone and a mechanical harmonium, which had facilitated Amir's first exposure to classical music and German marches. Amir had also been exposed to European music from the churches in Tanah Batak. Evangelism in Tanah Batak was relatively more successful than in other regions of Indonesia, not only because Tanah Batak was not characterized by any particular religion or belief before the spread of foreign settlers, but also because Dutch and German missionaries were able to blend aspects of western culture— churches, choral singing, western musical instruments, the diatonic system, etc.— into the Batak culture. Pasaribu noted the locals' aptitude in singing Bach cantatas as a choir, a regular program in church services.³ Although his son Nurman Pasaribu later confirmed that his father was a Moslem, young Amir Pasaribu enjoyed playing

³ Eritha Sitorus, *Amir Pasaribu: Komponis, Pendidik & Perintis Musik Klasik Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Media Kreatifa, 2009), 14.

the organ in the local Batakese Protestant church. His ears were trained in the diatonic, western music tradition early on.

After he graduated from ELS in the sixth grade, he proceeded onto junior high school in the *Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs* (MULO, Dutch: ‘middle school’). After moving to MULO in Tarutung and entering the ninth grade, he continued to study violin under the tutelage of *Meneer* Bosch. Back then, high school education was vocational, and was only attended by locals of the upper social echelon. Some schools, such as the *Algemeene Middlebare School* in Jogjakarta, prepared students to attend *Recht Hooge School*, or law school. Although Pasaribu was encouraged by his father to go there to become a judge, lawyer, or hold an esteemed governmental post like his father and brothers, he decided to pursue music instead and attended the domestic teacher’s school *Hollandsch-Inlandsche Kweekschool* (HIK) in Bandung, West Java, in 1931.

Pasaribu’s childhood was in stark contrast from that of most Indonesians in the colonial era in that there was hardly any mention of colonial oppression in Pasaribu’s story. In fact, he owed much of his early experiences to his Dutch mentors and friends. Consequentially, the Western musical culture was not forcibly imposed on him; he was drawn to the possibilities that it offered, and pursued Western music career path to satisfy his own curiosity. He was privileged, not only to receive education and to be able to decide his own career path, but also to experience being treated as a peer, not a subordinate, by the Dutch in the schools he attended. These privileges gave Pasaribu the confidence and ambition that led him to be one of the nation’s cultural leaders.

Bandung, Parijs van Java

The two things that had attracted Amir to Bandung, he admitted, were the “voices of paradise,” or the piano, and the “flower of life,” or the women. His expectations proved accurate not only because he met Siti Noerana Oemar Ali, the Palembang-native and aspiring French teacher who would later become his wife, but also because at the time Bandung was the center for western culture and entertainment. Initially developed as the place of transit for Dutch planters who worked around the surrounding Priangan highlands, Bandung quickly developed into an exclusive recreational city. It attracted many European settlers from the plantations and the main harbor Batavia⁴ who would spend their weekends in Bandung. The popularity of the De Vries grocery store among planters and expatriates spurred the growth of hotels, cinemas, cafes, and shops for luxurious European goods; mostly centered on the main promenade, *Bragaweg*.⁵ The Concordia Society, a club house with a large ballroom and a theatre, became the social hub for the high society. Starting the 1920s, modern art deco buildings began to sprout around the city. These developments, customized to the recreational needs of European settlers, earned Bandung its nickname *Parijs van Java*, the Paris of Java.

The demand for “high quality” European music simply could not be fulfilled by local musicians. As high societies in Batavia and Bandung became more established, musicians and orchestras from Europe started to come in. Some of them

⁴ Capital of the Dutch East Indies and now Indonesia; changed to “Jakarta” under the Japanese occupation in 1942.

⁵ Pradaningrum Mijarto, "Jalan Braga Berganti Rupa." *KOMPAS*, October 30, 2008, <http://www.nasional.kompas.com/read/2008/10/30/10505384/Jalan.Braga.Berganti.Rupa>.

saw the huge financial benefits of performing and teaching music to the expatriates of the Dutch East Indies, while some others had to flee their countries in Europe. In an article published in “Mimbar Indonesia” (1953) that later was compiled in his book *Analisis Musik Indonesia* (Indonesian: ‘Indonesian Music Analysis’), Amir Pasaribu described this influx of musicians as coming in several “waves.” The first wave in the 1900s was of Italian musicians who played in Batavia’s streets, as well as several Russian musicians. Next came the conservatory professors from the Soviet Union who fled the Bolshevik Revolution and settled in Indonesia around 1915. Afterwards, a Russian opera company arrived in 1920, four Russian musicians arrived in 1925,⁶ and a Russian *balalaika* ensemble arrived in 1930. Pasaribu also wrote about several smaller “waves” from France, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. These musicians played in big banquets for the elite societies and taught music. The biggest and most influential “wave,” he noted, was the American foxtrot and jazz music that was brought into Indonesia by “dance bands” from the Philippines in 1933. At the time, jazz was the accompanying music for silent Hollywood movies, and it was popular among youths in Indonesia’s large cities.⁷ This influx of western musical minds had influenced local musicians-in-training, and had significant impacts on Pasaribu’s music education and career. In HIK, not only was the curriculum western-based, but diligent and talented students were able to take intensive private lessons with professional Dutch or foreign teachers. Pasaribu consequently studied composition

⁶ One of them, Nicolai Farfolomeyef, later became Pasaribu’s cello instructor.

⁷ Amir Pasaribu, *Analisis Musik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pantja Simpati, 1986), 80-88.

Note: This book is a revised edition of *Musik dan Selingkar Wilajahnja*, published by the government publisher PP&K Jakarta, in 1955.

under the tutelage of James Zwaard, and piano from Willy van Swers and Joan Giesen.

When Amir was still in school, one Filipino dance band was looking for a pianist who could read music and was familiar with American tunes from the movies. Amir got the job, and performed with the dance band in dance parties every weekend. He also played the piano to entertain Dutch planters and landowners in their vacation houses. The fact that he earned more money in a week than a junior engineer in a month illustrated the high demand for “western” musicians at the time. Pasaribu, the talented local “Western” musician, was in the right time and place to boost his career.

Studying Abroad

Seeing much talent in Pasaribu, James Zwaard suggested that he take up cello. It would be easier for him to find a job playing a cello than a piano, because cellists were in demand among orchestras in the Dutch East Indies capital, Batavia. Pasaribu settled in Batavia after graduating from HIK in 1934, and studied cello under Farfolomeyef. The demand for cellists, it turned out, was high not only in Indonesia, but outside the country as well. Through his Filipino band mates, Pasaribu landed a job as a cellist for a Japanese cruise ship, sailing from Osaka and Kobe around Japan, even to Honolulu and Australia. Amir saw this opportunity as a way to earn money and as a stepping-stone to continue his musical training at the Musashino Music Academy, one of the most prestigious music conservatories in Japan. He left and worked for the Japanese cruise ship for fourteen months, during which time he also acquired Japanese language skills and collected money for his tuition. His preparation

culminated with his admission to the Musashino Academy in 1935. In 1939, Pasaribu completed what was supposed to be a five year music education in three and a half years, making him the first Indonesian musician to complete a degree abroad. He returned to Indonesia in 1940 and settled in Batavia.

Pasaribu, now 35 years old, decided that his desire to be a professional musician and teacher, in and out of Indonesia, would benefit from an internationally recognized teacher's certificate, specifically the Dutch government-issued *Middelbaar onderwijs-akte* (Dutch: 'Intermediate Education Certificate'). Despite not having much money to take the certification exam in the Netherlands, he was supported by his Dutch former teachers and connections. The Dutch ambassador for the Dutch East Indies agreed to sponsor his tickets and exam fees. After performing a set of piano pieces that included a fugue by Bach and the Chopin Concerto No. 2 in front of the judges and passing comprehensive music theory exams, he acquired his certificate and returned to the homeland.

The symphony orchestra scene in the Dutch East Indies at the time was thriving, and Pasaribu was welcomed with open arms. In 1940, he was one of the three locals hired to play in an exclusive orchestra, the "Orkes Radio van Batavia," for a pay that was "as much as that of a white person." He also played in other orchestras, and in many smaller *Kunstkring* (Dutch: 'art circle') that needed a cello player. *Kunstkring* audiences were mostly expatriates, intellectuals, and secondary school students. The members often invited classical musicians from Europe who were touring Australia or New Zealand to stop by and perform in the Dutch East Indies.

At the same time, popular music from the United States such as Dixieland, Ragtime, “Tin Pan Alley” Broadway tunes, Hawaiian music, and Hollywood soundtracks, had taken over the younger generations. They were popularized by the jazz bands from Manila, radio broadcasts, movies, gramophone plates, and social dancing events.⁸ As shown in his later articles in the local culture journals, Pasaribu was extremely critical of this trend, calling the Hollywood show-films and musicals “shallow”, and “kitschy”⁹ and then criticizing fans and amateurs of these genres for engaging in rowdy dance parties with “banal and vulgar” music and imitating and caring only to play as loud as possible without properly learning the proper technique,¹⁰ and for avoiding the classical and art music genre for being too difficult and elitist.¹¹ He wrote that this decadence could have been prevented if educators provided young people with quality music education that also guides the appreciation for good music. This Western music and culture craze, however, was dramatically curtailed in the years of the Japanese occupation.

Japanese Occupation

The West, in 1942, was in a tumultuous situation as more and more major countries became involved in the World War II. German invasion of the Netherlands oppressed the Dutch central government, keeping it from firmly holding on to its colonies. Japanese troops, in the height of aggression, were gradually taking over European colonies in South East Asia. In one week, the Imperial Japanese army had

⁸ Pasaribu, 84.

⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70-71.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

overpowered the Royal Dutch East Indies army and destroyed all Allied fleets in the Java Sea. The Dutch East Indies signed a document declaring unconditional surrender to Japan on March 9, 1942 in Kalijati. To Indonesians, the Japanese victory that ended the Dutch colonization at first seemed to be the light at the end of the tunnel. Their wish for independence, however, was not immediately granted, and the Japanese occupation turned out to be the most oppressive and devastating colonial regime in Indonesian history.

Strategies employed by the Japanese in Indonesia were based on two priorities: first, to erase Western influences in Indonesia, and second, to mobilize Indonesian people to the advantage of the Japanese during the War.¹² To erase traces of the Western culture, the spoken and written use of Dutch and English were strictly prohibited. Many schools were closed down, but in those that were not, Bahasa Indonesia¹³ replaced Dutch as the language of instruction. All shops, restaurants, and businesses had to replace their signs with one written in Bahasa Indonesia or Japanese. Films and books with Dutch language were banned from distribution. The Japanese quickly took control of communication, shutting down connections between islands and to the outside world. Although strictly controlled, newspaper and radio became the method of communication between societies across the country.

Batavia was renamed Jakarta. The *Hollandsch-Inlandsche Kweekschool* (HIK) where Pasaribu taught music was now *Kootoo Shihan Gakko*. What was taught in Dutch yesterday now had to be taught in Bahasa Indonesia. When classes in other schools had to be put on hold, Pasaribu did not miss a day of teaching. Despite the

¹² M. C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004*, (Jakarta: Serambi, 1948), 409-410.

¹³ Largely based on the Malay language, a *lingua franca* in the Indonesian archipelago.

dramatic changes in the social and cultural landscape, Pasaribu showed the utmost persistence as a music teacher. Pasaribu even came up with a teacher's guide, using music theory terms that are translated into Bahasa Indonesia. This guide was later published as the book "Teori Singkat Tulisan Musik" (Brief Theory of Music Writing). He also wrote a teacher's guide on music appreciation, "Menuju Apresiasi Musik" (Towards Music Appreciation), and an anthology of short biographies of prominent Western composers and musicians, "Riwayat Musik dan Musisi" (History of Music and Musicians), during the occupation years. All of it was done to ease the transition and ensure the continuation of music education.

In April 1943, the Japanese government established *Keimin Bunka Shidosho*, or Japanese Cultural Center, "to promote literary works, songs, theatre and films produced by indigenous Indonesian artists."¹⁴ In reality, this foundation functioned on the same principles as the *Kulturkammer* system, enforced by the Germans in the occupied Netherlands to censor the opinions and ideas that were disseminated to the society. Local artists had to subscribe to the rules imposed by the foundation, and the government strictly regulated their works. Lyrics of Western *Lieder* were changed; references to the West in *Keroncong* songs and hymns were taken out. The Keimin Bunka Shidosho made sure all forms of art were in furtherance of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

Many artists succumbed to these fascist ideals out of fear. Pasaribu recalled in his interview with Sitorus, that the Japanese did not take "no" for an answer, and

¹⁴ Julianti Lakshmi Parani, "National Culture and Ethnic Cultures: Government Policy and Performing Arts in 20th Century Indonesia" (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 2003), 56.

those who did not cooperate would be handcuffed.¹⁵ Pasaribu, now married, worked as a music teacher, orchestra cellist, and the head of the music studio in the RRI national radio station. Keimin Bunka Shidosho employed Pasaribu and his fellow composers to compose propaganda songs, broadcasted through the radio stations. Every morning, Pasaribu accompanied “Kimigayo,” the Japanese national anthem, and other propaganda songs with the piano for the radio broadcast. He also played to entertain guests in banquets and meetings of Japanese leaders and often performed Indonesian popular tunes, arranged for solo piano. The Japanese commanders especially favored Pasaribu due to his fluency in Japanese, and he was often employed as a translator. For accepting these positions, Pasaribu was suspected to be pro-Japan by his peers.

Perhaps the only good thing that came out of the Japanese occupation was the flourishing of nationalism among Indonesians. The compulsory use of Bahasa Indonesia was enforced mainly to push Japanese propaganda messages, but it had also boosted the number of speakers of the nation’s unifying language. People from different islands and tribes can now communicate with a common language. The wiping out of themes that glorified the Western culture from music and the arts made Indonesian artists turn to local cultures and values for inspiration. Propaganda songs that rhapsodize about the greatness and beauty of their homeland had planted pride and sense of belonging in the heart of Indonesians. This rise of nationalism compelled national leaders to continually demand that the Japanese fulfill their promises.

¹⁵ Sitorus, 42.

Independence

Japan's occupation in Indonesia lasted until 14 August 1945, when Japan announced its surrender to the Allies. Indonesian activists who had been secretly following the World War II news caught this through the BBC broadcast. The Japanese originally planned to give the gift of independence to Indonesia on August 24. Sutan Sjahrir, representing the young activists, urged Soekarno¹⁶ to declare the independence immediately. Sjahrir argued that it should not be a gift from Japan, but instead should be a result of Indonesia's own effort. After many disputes between the young and old generations of national leaders, Soekarno finally proclaimed Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945 in Jakarta.

The news of independence after 350 years of Dutch colonization and three and a half years of Japanese occupation needed to be announced to all corners of Indonesia. This was a big feat, not only because Indonesia consists of so many islands, but also because the Japanese government still ruled many parts of the country. In an anecdote commonly told in history classrooms, young activists even built a make-do radio transmitter to broadcast the news, because some Japanese commanders angrily forbade anyone from using the Domei news station facility. Pasaribu was also involved in the underground efforts to broadcast Indonesia's independence through the radio.

This national euphoria, however, was tainted with anxiety. Soon after achieving victory with the Allies in the World War II, the Dutch sent military powers to Indonesia with the intent of reoccupying its colony. Furthermore, many parts of

¹⁶ Soekarno was then the chairperson of the Japan-established *Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (PPKI), or Indonesia Independence Preparation Committee. In 1945, he became the first president of Indonesia.

Indonesia were still ambivalent about whether they wanted to fight with the new country or rejoin the Dutch as a “puppet state”. Nevertheless, in the four years between 1945 and 1949, also known as the Indonesian National Revolution, the Dutch reoccupation efforts were met with military and diplomatic resistance all over the country. Indonesian nationalism had grown significantly during the Japanese occupation and grew even more when Indonesia had to defend its independence; it also became a prevalent theme in music, literature, and arts generated in this era.

Some young literates and artists actively participated in the battles. One of them is composer Cornel Simanjuntak, who had led several rebellions in Jakarta. He was Pasaribu’s, friend, roommate, and workmate in the national radio during the Japanese occupation. Simanjuntak was a fiery activist whose patriotic songs, namely *Tanah Airku*, *Sorak-Sorak Bergembira*, and *Maju Tak Gentar*, are still sung in schools and national ceremonies today. Simanjuntak bid farewell to go to Yogyakarta, without telling anyone that he had a bullet lodged in his leg for two weeks. He died on September 15, 1946. Amir Pasaribu was overcome with grief; not only was Simanjuntak a close friend, he and Pasaribu also shared similar cultural perspectives.

The phrase “*mengisi kemerdekaan*” (Bahasa Indonesia: ‘to fill/give substance and meaning to independence’) is often said to describe the duty of all Indonesians as the next phase of independence. The youth’s struggle is now to build and develop the nation. Pasaribu served this duty by taking up many roles in the field of music: still a musician, but also a teacher, scholar, composer, essayist, and lobbyist; all of which will be explained in the sections below.

Pasaribu the Educator and Ethnomusicologist

In 1948, Dr. Van der Hoop, a Dutch conservator at the Museum Jakarta, called Pasaribu to show him the pile of reports stored in the museum. Those reports were studies on Indonesian traditional music, written by Western musicologists and ethnomusicologists before the war. Among them were works by Karl Halusa, who wrote about the music and traditions in the Mentawai islands, and Colin McPhee, the Canadian composer and ethnomusicologist who studied Balinese music extensively. Pasaribu was too busy to carefully look into all of them—but he expressed his wish for a higher education institution in the arts that could give rise to “nose for musical research, inquiring mind”—students who could conduct research on traditional music with the Western methodology.¹⁷

Never losing his focus on Indonesia’s folk music, Pasaribu wrote many articles about foreign composers and music traditions. In his article about Turkey and Hungary, he expressed his wish that Indonesia could learn from other countries about how to preserve its own traditional music. Zoltan Kodaly’s efforts to systematically collect and notate 12,000 folk tunes, and the rigor of folk music education in their conservatories, were key to Hungary’s successful formation of the foundations of modern music. As a result, Pasaribu added, perhaps with slight sarcasm, “they do not experience the “East-West” or “native-foreign” clash.”¹⁸ Related to this admiration of Hungary, Pasaribu wished Indonesia could have a conservatory or a formal music

¹⁷ Sitorus, 60.

¹⁸ Pasaribu, 25.

academy. After the independence, he continuously tried to persuade the Indonesian government to establish one such institution.¹⁹

In 1952, the *Sekolah Musik Indonesia* (SMIND) or Music School of Indonesia was built in Jogjakarta, a music school that taught music according to the Western tradition.²⁰ Pasaribu was appointed the composition teacher, and was promoted to be the director in 1954. He created the missions, rules and regulations, curriculum, and examination materials. He asked his foreign connections to support this school, resulting in the acquisition of 37 upright pianos and the hiring of teachers from Europe.²¹ Students typically entered SMIND for a five-year curriculum after they finished the middle school. Upon graduation, students demanded that they be given the undergraduate-level diploma; however, Pasaribu thought the competency level was not up to par. He maintained the opinion that the school was not ready to become a “college”, and the quality of graduates needed to match the granted deed. In 1957, the discontent students were still disputing this school’s status. Pasaribu resigned and moved back to Jakarta.

Pasaribu the Composer

Pasaribu started composing little tunes in his teenage years, but most of his compositions he kept to himself. In the HIK teacher’s school in Bandung, he studied composition under James Zwaard. While Pasaribu did not write much about his own studies in composition, he did write extensively about his favorite Western

¹⁹ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, "Amir, Sang Maestro," *TEMPO*, February 15, 2009, 56.

²⁰ SMIND is now the Music Department of *Institut Seni Indonesia* (ISI, ‘Indonesian Arts Institute’).

²¹ Sitorus, 122.

composers, often including a detailed description of their biographies, the era and sociocultural influences, as well as composing techniques and aesthetics. He wrote favorably of most Western composers and appreciated different extremes and aesthetics; from Bach to Prokofiev, Wagner to Debussy.

In an article, he expressed his admiration for Debussy's ability to create a misty atmosphere, also stating that "from the softness with which Debussy mixed instrument timbres, a combination was created; coming out of a new instrument that has never been known before: the illusion."²² Bach was a big influence—Pasaribu practiced two or three *Fugues* daily²³ and composed a piece for cello, titled *Meditation*, inspired by Bach's six suites for the same instrument.²⁴ By diligently researching about his favorite composers, examining their compositions, and applying the techniques he learned in his own compositions, Pasaribu acquired sophistication in his works that was far beyond his time.

Unlike his peers at the time, Pasaribu was not particularly fond of composing songs with words. Even so, he had also written several songs and marches, usually with nationalistic spirit. In fact, his most familiar work is probably the march *Andhika Bhayangkari*, which is now used as a march for the Indonesian National Army, played during the nationally televised Independence Day ceremony at the *Istana Negara* (State Palace) every year. During the Japanese occupation, Pasaribu composed not only propaganda songs but also school songs, because the banning of

²² 'Warna instrumentasi dicarinya dalam kehalusan jika ia mencampur timbre, terdengarlah kombinasi seperti menghadapi instrument yang belum pernah dikenal bunyinya: ilusi.' Pasaribu, 159.

²³ Sitorus, 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

Dutch from schools had exposed the lack of school songs in Bahasa Indonesia.²⁵ Starting in 1950, he arranged lyrical songs for the show “Pelajaran Menyanyi” (Singing Lessons) in the national radio. In 1951-1952, Pasaribu also wrote around forty songs, mostly patriotic, as commissioned by Mayor Soeyosno—of which he kept no copy. Pasaribu made clear that he would only write songs with lyrics when someone requested him to—or when he had to use it for educational purposes. He also wrote songs for competitions held by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which he won twice: in 1952 with the song *Sakti*, and in 1954 with *Tari*.²⁶ Yet, he admitted that he never even sang in the shower. For the purpose of his own self-expression, the music that came out of his own mind was instrumental in the first place.²⁷ The ethnomusicologist Franki Raden wrote that, for Amir Pasaribu, “music is absolute music.”²⁸

In 1952, however, Pasaribu suffered from the oppression of creativity as the slogan “*awas barat*” (Indonesian: ‘be careful of the West’) became prevalent. Composers of non-entertainment music were shunned, and the production of “art music” was stagnant. Pasaribu did not conform—instead, he encouraged his peers to persist; as is shown in his advices to J.A. Dungga:

Let the time, the future, judge the value of our work, whether we become our country’s flower or society’s riffraff; even when in our toil we do not think about those things. We are only giving structure to our creative impulse, and trying to do it with honesty.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., 50.

²⁶ Ibid., 111.

²⁷ Ibid., 84.

²⁸ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, 56.

²⁹ “Biarlah masa, hari kemudian yang menentukan nilai buah pekerjaan kita, apakah kita menjadi bunga bangsa atau sampah masyarakat kita, walaupun kita dalam bekerja tidak memikirkan hal-hal itu. Kita hanya memberi bentuk pada dorongan cipta kita dan mencoba melakukannya dengan penuh

As such, Pasaribu made it clear that the most important things to keep in mind as a composer in difficult times are staying true to yourself, not caring too much about what others think, and more importantly not letting anyone dictate your artistic freedom.

Pasaribu, the Music Critic

The range of topics that Pasaribu covered in his articles is expansive; he wrote about anything from Western musicology and ethnomusicology, music pedagogy, history, and theory, to concert reviews. He did not limit himself to one or two specialties—in whatever topic he discussed, he displayed careful observations and comprehensive research. Reading his articles on popular and Hollywood culture, various Western composers, and how to teach music to young people “the right way,” it is easy to assume he was an academic elitist who glorified “highbrow” music and Western musicians, and devalued everything else. A brief review of Pasaribu’s critiques on concert performers and the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, will change this perspective.

First of all, Pasaribu’s sharp critiques did not spare foreign musicians. He wrote favorably about the young French guitarist, Ida Presti—whose concert was attended by hundreds of students in 1952.³⁰ Towards Elise Cserfalvi, a pianist from Budapest, however, he was unforgiving. He thought Cserfalvi’s playing relied entirely on technical virtuosity, without any depth of interpretation. Pasaribu was

kejujuran.’ Pasaribu, as quoted by J.A. Dunga, in “Badut-Badut Sekitar Seni Musik Indonesia” (Sitorus, 2009:83-84).

³⁰ Sitorus, 108.

annoyed with the fact that she played her encore piece, Paganini's *La Streghe*, too lightly, "like salon music." He further wrote bitterly, "What is with Cserfalvi's taste? All programs came crashing down with her, like a fallen ripe jackfruit... soggy!"³¹ He showed no mercy for friends, colleagues, and the quality of supporting factors either. After receiving Pasaribu's criticism about the poor quality piano in their concert hall, the Sticusa institute³² replaced their piano. Six months later, Pasaribu wrote about the concert, then starring his own teacher, Joan Giesen: "Tonight, Giesen is lucky to be playing on a brand new, shiny Steinway... as such, the pedal still produces knocks, like the bass-drum in the 'Jazz at the Philharmonic.'" ³³

The Orkes Radio Philharmonic (ORD), was an orchestra comprised of sixty five professional musicians from the Netherlands who arrived in 1948, sent by the central Dutch government. Relating to the cultural exchange efforts after Indonesia's independence, ORD's task was to play symphonic music on and off the radio, teach young people in schools, and educate the public through concerts. With four gulden per concert ticket, and thirty gulden for a season ticket, the cost to attend this concert is as expensive as in the Netherlands. The ORD played "standard" orchestra repertoire—works by Schubert, Smetana, Händel, Dvorak, and Saint-Saens, among many others. Pasaribu was hired as a cellist in the ORD, one of the three locals in the full-fledged orchestra. Almost everyone in the audience was Dutch. After a series of military aggression that followed, Indonesia was finally recognized as an independent country by the Netherlands in 1950. Indonesian national leaders dismissed the ORD.

³¹ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, 60.

³² Sticusa, or *Stichting voor Culturele Samenwerking tussen Nederland en de 'Overzeese Rijksdelen'*, is a Dutch cultural exchange institute, focused on improving cultural relations between the Netherlands and its former colonies.

³³ Sitorus, 116.

About this, Pasaribu wrote, “ORD gave good Western music, but it was too ‘high’ for our people. Can be appreciated, but cannot be enjoyed.”³⁴ While this comment might sound apologetic and “highbrow,” it is important to remember that Pasaribu had also been a strong proponent of teaching classical music appreciation to Indonesian youth. For him, the ultimate conscious appreciation comes from being both emotionally and intellectually moved, “feeling” and “understanding” the music.³⁵ In another article, he argued that Indonesian schools taught both Indonesian language and literature; so young people were ready to appreciate and understand the world literature. In the music sphere, however, he felt that there was a “big void”.³⁶

Pasaribu the Lobbyist

In September 1950, Pasaribu founded the Composers’ League with 10 members. High interest from musicians and composers prompted him to change the name into *Ikatan Pemusik Indonesia* (Indonesian Musicians Association) later in the same year, now with 80 members. With this organization, Pasaribu wanted to fight for musicians’ exclusive rights to their work. The Dutch system actually left Indonesia with some regulations regarding copyright, made in 1912.³⁷ After Indonesia’s independence, however, this seemed to be a forgotten cause, and composers did not receive any money from performances of their works. This situation proved disadvantageous to striving composers and musicians whose lives

³⁴ Sitorus, 64.

³⁵ ‘Dan kenikmatan yang sadar itu ialah merasakan dan mengerti.’ Amir Pasaribu, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁷ Sitorus, 77.

depended entirely on compositions and creative works, and Pasaribu was eager to change it.

In an article, titled “Hak Cipta Musik” (Music Copyright), published in the *Pedoman Radio* (Radio Guide) magazine in January 1952, Pasaribu wrote about the history of music copyright, tracing its roots to the musicians playing at the café-concert *Ambassadeurs* in 1850. He also explained, in Bahasa Indonesia, what a music copyright entails and specific situations, and details that need to be taken into consideration. This includes the use of new technologies such as TV and radio, and the difference between edition/reproduction rights and performance/representation rights—the two exclusive rights a composer should have over his or her creations.³⁸

For the second *Bintang Radio* (Radio Star) Festival in September 1952, the RRI (Radio of the Republic of Indonesia, the national radio) planned to perform a series of Pasaribu’s compositions. For this performance, Pasaribu demanded for the appropriate royalties to be paid. The RRI refused, however, and this snowballed into a big argument with Maladi, the head of the RRI. Many events in which Pasaribu’s music were to be performed, including one titled “Malam Musik Ciptaan-Ciptaan Amir Pasaribu” (A Night of Amir Pasaribu’s Music), were stalled. Consequently, and to the nation’s shock and dismay, Pasaribu was fired from the RRI on 13 September 1952. Not only that, but the government also banned Pasaribu’s works from being published, or even performed on the radio. The national author Pramoedya Ananta Toer wrote about his reactions in *Pujangga Baru*, September 1952: “Ini adalah *kegemparan* (This is a commotion).”³⁹

³⁸ Pasaribu, 188-194.

³⁹ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, 54.

Starting 1953, Pasaribu's music was, using Dunga's words, "put in the icebox" by the government.⁴⁰ Maladi and the government received strong criticisms from musicians like Dunga, who wrote that Pasaribu had been treated unfairly, especially by Maladi, who had always praised the uniqueness of Indonesian folk music and promoted traditional music through cultural missions. Pasaribu was angered even more by the fact that after the banning of his works, the government still sent some of his music to be performed in the Indonesian embassy in Paris.⁴¹

Pasaribu continued teaching, performing with local orchestras, and writing articles. In 1968, after deciding that the cultural situation in Indonesia was worse than he could ever imagine, Pasaribu took Sticusa's offer to lead the symphony orchestra in Paramaribo, Suriname. "I lost belief in music and Indonesia. Life is hard and bitter, individuality is crushed! My salary is only enough for three days."⁴² In addition, after the Soeharto takeover in 1965 in which communism was completely eradicated from Indonesia, anyone suspected of having been involved with the communist party was being hunted. While it was not clear to what extent was Pasaribu involved in *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (LEKRA), the cultural association founded by the communist party,⁴³ his close friends Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Sitor Situmorang, both authors, were captured and imprisoned for this reason. Gonny Pasaribu, Amir Pasaribu's granddaughter, wrote that Pasaribu "was lucky enough to get away before they would throw him in jail as well."⁴⁴ Pasaribu's son Nurman, however, contended

⁴⁰ J.A. Dunga, "Kesenian Musik Indonesia Yang Mana? Dan Bagaimana Nilainya?" *Majalah Kebudayaan*, November 1953, 693, quoted in Sitorus, 105.

⁴¹ Sitorus, 97.

⁴² Interview with Pasaribu by Sitorus, 2002, quoted in Sitorus, 131.

⁴³ Rhoma D. A. Yuliantri, "LEKRA and Ensembles," *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H. T. Liem (Leiden: KITLV, 2012), 427.

⁴⁴ Gonny Pasaribu, e-mail to the author, November 11, 2011.

that the departure of the Pasaribu family has anything to do with the anti-communist purge following the September 30 incident.⁴⁵

Pasaribu left for Suriname with his wife, Siti Noerana, and his five sons, Chairul Irman, Nurman, Erwin, Irwan, and Fauzi. He, it seemed, was ready to leave his homeland with all the bitter memories behind and start a new life and career where he was much more appreciated.

⁴⁵ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, 56.

Chapter II

National Culture

The Great Debate

On June 8-10, 1935, a congress for *Permusyawaratan Perguruan Indonesia* (Society of Indonesian Academies and Schools) was held. This meeting was the first to bring up a new dialogue as well as intense polemics about culture and national identity that would last for more than three decades. There was a clear divide between the older generation and the younger generation of national leaders in terms of how Western influence should be positioned in the Indonesian culture and society. Despite the fact that coherent notions of “Western,” “Culture,” and “moral” were never decided before these words were thrown around, the meeting resulted in a declaration of values that were backed mostly by the older generation of educators, including the national heroes Dr. Soetomo and Ki Hadjar Dewantara: anti-intellectualism, anti-individualism, anti-egoism, and anti-materialism.¹

For the older generation, these “Western values” had brought about moral decadency, and therefore all Western influences had to be taken out from the Indonesian culture. The leader of a younger group also known collectively as the *Poejangga Baroe* (new literates/new poets generation), an influential writer and philosopher Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, openly expressed in his article following the conference that these statements tackled the wrong problems—problems that only recently appeared in Western civilization. Indonesians had become more dynamic and

¹ Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, *Polemik Kebudayaan*, ed. Achdiat K. Mihardja (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1948), 43-44.

revolutionary in the last two or three decades because Western schooling had taught them a healthy dose of individualism, intellectualism, and self-sufficiency. These “anti” slogans, he wrote, need to be replaced by more positive and fiery campaigns to educate the people; to match their minds to those of the West, and to claim the nation’s rights. Alisjahbana further wrote after the congress:

Therefore I am sure that Western elements would exist as a big part of the currently developing Indonesian culture; a dynamic component. It is not a humiliation for a nation. This would not be the first time for our country to take outside influences: Hinduist culture, Arabic culture. And now it is time to shift our gaze to the West.²

Unlike Hinduist or Arabic culture, which had been deeply embedded in Indonesia’s culture since the days of ancient kingdoms Sriwijaya and Demak, the Western culture was a topic for endless discussion, because its spread was experienced first-handed by all of the members of the current debate, who came to associate it with both oppression and illumination of modernity. Jennifer Lindsay (2012) identified this ambivalence as core to the complication of the Great Debate: “while the nationalist movement was a fight against Western colonialism, many saw the same West as the future.”³

This debate started in 1935 and lasted until the late sixties, accompanying the three decades of most turbulent political changes in Indonesia’s history. When the Japanese occupation arrived in Indonesia, this debate had to be put on hold, and the removal of all Western elements from the public life was done by force. After the

² ‘Demikian saya meyakini bahwa dalam kebudayaan Indonesia yang sedang tumbuh sekarang ini akan terdapan sebagian besar unsur Barat, unsur yang dinamis. Hal itu bukan kehinaan bagi suatu bangsa. Bangsa kita pun bukan baru sekali ini mengambil unsur-unsur dari luar: kebudayaan Hindu, kebudayaan Arab. Dan Sekarang tiba waktunya mengarahkan pandangan kita ke Barat.’ S. T. Alisjahbana, in Mihardja, 10-11.

³ Jennifer Lindsay, Introduction to *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H. T. Liem (Leiden: KITLV, 2012), 12-13.

Independence Day on August 17, 1945, the debate resurfaced as the new country tried to define its own identity. As a result, three cultural congresses were held after Indonesia's independence, organized by various institutions that concerned themselves with Indonesian culture. They did this to set the foundations of culture for the new Indonesia, which would be used to guide the building of the nation and the people.⁴ The first congress was held in Magelang (1948), the second in Bandung (1951), and the third in Solo (1954). In these congresses, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana was again a strong advocate for learning from the West and leaving the static mentality of the past, and he was again heavily criticized by the older generation. Overtime, the notion of "culture" had changed from issues merely related to arts and music to the endless effort of the Indonesian people to answer challenges of their time. The discussion now covered other topics such as the economy, politics, religion, sociology and technology, and involved intellectuals from many disciplines as well.⁵ It was also the case that political parties took sides on this debate as means of gaining more supporters, and the discussion that was supposed to be about culture became politically charged.⁶ "Pro-West" and "pro-East" were strongly dichotomized and often taken beyond the context of arts and literature.

Writers and composers realized that the outcomes of these debates would have a significant influence on their lives and artistic freedom, and this compelled them to take actions. In 1950, young writers such as Chairil Anwar, Usmar Ismail, Pramoedya

⁴ K. Purbopranoto, "Kongres Kebudayaan." *Mimbar Indonesia*, August 21, 1948, 20, cited in Eritha Sitorus, *Amir Pasaribu: Komponis, Pendidik & Perintis Musik Klasik Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Media Kreatifa, 2009), 7.

⁵ Sri Indrayati, "Meninggalkan Budaya Agraris." *TEMPO*, November 2, 1991, <http://majalah.tempointeraktif.com/id/arsip/1991/11/02/NAS/mbm.19911102.NAS15562.id.html>.

⁶ Sitorus, 125.

Toer and Asrul Sani under the name “Generation 45” issued the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* (Gelanggang Testimonial). It is a credo stating that, as “true heirs to the world culture,” Gelanggang authors proclaimed their independence from “religious ideas, political ideologies, economic interests, and the expectations of the reading public.” They reclaimed their freedom in choosing from among many stimulating influences in the world, to translate any influence into their own voices.⁷

Political Manifesto and Cultural Manifesto

In this period, there were many uprisings and separatist movements throughout Indonesia, as half of the archipelago was a puppet-state controlled by the Dutch government. This impeded the country’s progress. To control it, President Soekarno issued the “1945 Constitution Political Manifesto,” a decree entailing the reinstatement of the 1945 constitution as a replacement to the federal constitution, and the dissolution of the constitutional assembly in 1959. This gave him absolute power over the government that, in the context of the Cold War, worried the United States. The United States’ temporary support for the rebelling Revolutionary Government of the Indonesian Republic (PRRI) had worsened the US-Indonesia relationship. This anti-Western sentiment was then used by the Communist Party to influence Soekarno. The party established an influential cultural institution called *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (LEKRA), founded in 1950 based on the awareness of the strong connection between revolution and culture.⁸ A section in the Political

⁷ Martina Heinschke, "Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts," *Indonesia*, no. 61 (1996): 145-69.

⁸ Rhoma D. A. Yuliantri, “LEKRA and Ensembles,” *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H. T. Liem (Leiden: KITLV, 2012), 423.

Manifesto included instruction to preserve the national culture and to reject the imperialism in culture, here directed towards the Western culture.⁹ These instructions became the mission of LEKRA.

After this Manifesto was issued, it became very easy for anyone, with any known or unknown intention, to accuse authors, musicians, poets who are considered “progressive” of being disloyal and unpatriotic. To solve this problem, a group of artists and authors issued the *Manifesto Kebudayaan*, or the Culture Manifesto, in 1963. It declared their freedom to do “art for art’s sake,” and refusal to put one cultural sector above the others. Artists then polarized into two groups, the “Front Kebudayaan Revolusioner” (Revolutionary Culture Front), and “Front Kebudayaan Pancasila”¹⁰ (Pancasila Culture Front). President Soekarno banned the Culture Manifesto in 1964. It was impossible to still use the dichotomy of “West” and “East” in this era, because Indonesian leaders, artists, and intellectuals had taken the meaning of modernity and nationalism in various different directions. The Great Debate happened between national leaders who were pro-socialism and those who were pro-capitalism, values that were epitomized by the USSR and USA, respectively. Without going further into these shifts in political and cultural ideologies, it was obvious that both countries are unmistakably “West,” and both embraced modernity in all aspects of life. Yet, fears of “cultural penetration” and disappearance of the national identity had forced the governments of many third-

⁹ M. C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004*. (Jakarta: Serambi, 1948), 520-521.

¹⁰ Pancasila is the philosophical foundation of Indonesia.

world countries, including Indonesia, to issue explicit “cultural policies.”¹¹ This situation severely limited the freedom of expression, and called a halt to the creative industry. As such, the turbulent political situation in Indonesia after the independence largely affected artists and intellectuals.

Pasaribu's Opinions

Pasaribu, after the banning of his music, was an active essayist. Armin Pane and Pramodya A. Toer noted him to be a sharp and articulate writer. Pasaribu never wanted to argue about things outside of his domain, music, and he was angered by the many cultural leaders domineered the debate about “National Music” without knowing much about music. He wished for the discussion to be left to Indonesian music scholars, just like “the sole sticking to the shoe.”¹²

Unlike composer Binsar Sitompul who was a prime member of the *Manifesto Kebudayaan* movement, Pasaribu was a “sole sticking to shoe” in music, and did not show any interest in getting involved in politics. This was confirmed by his friend, the author and former Gelanggang activist Sitor Situmorang.¹³ Still, politics got taken into music. Western-educated musicians like Pasaribu were accused of being “too Westernized” by conservative cultural leaders, who wanted Indonesian “national music” to be derived entirely from ethnic music, “peaks of regional music.” They quoted Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s celebrated quote from his address at the first Cultural

¹¹ Asa Briggs, “Culture,” *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communication Centered Handbook*, ed. Richard Bauman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8.

¹² ‘Lap-sol sepatu menetap pada landasannya.’ Amir Pasaribu, quoted in Sitorus, 14.

¹³ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, “Amir, Sang Maestro,” *TEMPO*, February 15, 2009, 56.

Congress, that Indonesia's national culture should comprise the "peaks of regional cultures."¹⁴ Responding to this issue, Pasaribu wrote in 1955:

... our cultural leaders pretend to have a polemic about peaks of indigenous culture, regional culture, [and] the sums and various 'resultante.' Even when the characteristic and essential phenomenon of each regional music is not known, so the above matter turns out to be an unsuccessful and bankrupt propaganda! Those leaders are busy looking up, trying to find the peaks. That is fictional! Those peaks do not exist.¹⁵

This rather harsh criticism, written in an article titled "Memelihara Musik Rakjat" (Sustaining Folk Music), was concluded with the suggestion for informed music enthusiast to take responsibility of the music development in Indonesia. It is done by hearing with the inner ear, again and again, the essence and "local colors" from each musical cluster in the Indonesian archipelago, instead of first setting up theories about "peaks," "resultant," or other ways that "put the cart before the buffalo," or are counter-productive.¹⁶

Pasaribu's colleague J.A. Dungga added to this criticism that the same cultural leaders who said "be careful of the West!" also whistled Western diatonic songs, and quoted Western books in their essays.¹⁷ About the accusation that Pasaribu was "too Western" because he played his music on the piano or cello, and used "modern"

¹⁴ 'Kebudayaan Indonesia (Nasional) ialah kebudayaan, yang kini sedangnja kita bangun dan kita susun dari segala sari-sari dan puntjak-puntjak segala kebudayaan Daerah diseluruh kepulauan Indonesia.' Ki Hadjar Dewantara, quoted in Lindsay, 15-16.

¹⁵ '... para gembong kita itu sok polemik tentang puntjak-puntjak kebudayaan asli, kebudayaan daerah, djumlah-djumlah dan segala matjam 'resultante'. Sedang tiap-tiap musik daerah tidak diketahui phenommnja yang karakteristik dan essensiil, hinggal hal di atas itu ternjata sebagai propaganda yang gagal dan bangkrut! Pada pentolan itu repot menoleh keatas, kepingin ketemu puntjak-puntjaknya. Itulah dia fiksi! Puntjak-puntjak itu tidak ada.' Amir Pasaribu, *Musik dan Selingkar Wilajahnja*, (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Perguruan Kementrian PP&K, 1955), 85.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷ Sitorus, 82.

scales, Dunga thought it was ridiculous; and it showed that these cultural leaders did not understand even the elementary knowledge of music.¹⁸

Pasaribu further quoted the violinist Sutan Kalimuda that the Western influence is irresistible: We have to take what is good from it, the techniques and *wetenschap* (Dutch: ‘knowledge’), not as the goal but as the tools to achieve our own needs.¹⁹ He believed that the adoption of Western basic musical structure, for example diatonicism, was necessary; because Indonesia has so many diverse traditional musical modes and scales, the only way they could have the so-called “national music” is to use the diatonic scale. This is exemplified in the Indonesian national anthem, *Indonesia Raya*. It is composed according to the Western diatonic scale, but was lauded by the national leaders, regardless of their position in the Great Debate, as the song that unified Indonesians across the archipelago.

Another argument that Pasaribu gave in response to the accusations is that the “Indonesian-ness” is an inherent quality of all Indonesian composers.

To us, Cornel [Simanjuntak], Binsar [Sitompul], and me, “West” and “East” is not an issue; not because we want to be cosmopolitan, no. It just means we cannot let go of our Indonesian-ness. Cannot. We are Indonesians. That is it. ... For me, it does not have to be completely named Indonesian music. The important thing is if the music is good or bad. A composition is only a documentation of a moment in my mind. *Alhamdulillah* if the society supports it...²⁰

¹⁸ J.A. Dunga and L. Manik, *Musik di Indonesia dan Beberapa Persoalannya*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1952), 34.

¹⁹ Sitorus, 8-9.

²⁰ ‘Bagi kami, Cornel, Binsar, dan saya, Barat dan Timur itu bukan persoalan, bukan karena mau menjadi kosmopolit, bukan. Artinya kita tidak bisa melepaskan keindonesiaan kita. Tidak bisa. Kita orang Indonesia. Habis perkara. ... Buat saya tidak mutlak harus musik Indonesia namanya. Yang penting musik itu baik atau tidak baik. Komposisi itu juga hanya sebuah dokumentasi pada suatu saat dalam diri saya. Syukur alhamdulillah kalau didukung masyarakat...’ Amir Pasaribu, quoted in Sitorus, 54.

Pasaribu, in fact, did make a conscious effort to “preserve the local colors” and recreate “Indonesian-ness” in the music he composed, mainly by adopting the traditional tonality. His fellow critic J.A. Dungga disparaged cultural leaders who were busy debating in the congresses but were absent in one 1951 RRI concert, where Mrs. Sutisno performed Pasaribu’s new pieces, *Sriwijaya Variations* and *Sonata No. 1*. By just observing from afar, Dungga said, these cultural leaders thought they could arrive at a conclusion about what Indonesian music is and should be. Pasaribu had exemplified that action speaks louder than words, and he actively experimented with Western techniques and traditional tones to create new formulations of Indonesian music.

This Great Debate lasted until around 1966, when in the New Order under President Soeharto, the Decree of the People's Representative Assembly (MPRS) IV, Chapter 27, Article 12 on 5 July 1956 stated: “The development of Indonesian culture is to embody the guiding towards the unified Indonesian culture, one that takes its source from the rich and diverse regional cultures, but accepts foreign cultures that enrich and elevate the National Culture.”²¹ Indonesia opened its doors to the world, embracing instead of repelling what it offers. Classical music too started to thrive. In 1968 with the efforts of Jakarta’s mayor, Ali Sadikin, a new Western classical orchestra was established, The Jakarta Symphony Orchestra, supported by a new concert building with a cultural foundation, *Dewan Kesenian Jakarta* (Jakarta Arts

²¹ ‘Perkembangan kebudayaan nasional Indonesia supaya mencorakkan pembinaan kesatuan kebudayaan Indonesia yang bersumber pada kebudayaan-kebudayaan daerah yang beragam dan kaya rayaserta dapat menerima kebudayaan luar yang bersifat memperkaya dan mempertinggi Kebudayaan Nasional.’ Sitorus, 132.

Council) that is still active today.²² What he had been advocating through his writings and compositions for decades had finally started to materialize. It was not known whether or not Pasaribu was aware of these changes, however, because he had left the country only months before.

²² Ibid.

Chapter III

Pasaribu's Music as a Response

Musical Nationalism

The rise of nationalism in the twentieth century Asia and Africa resulted in the emergence of new liberated nations. National identity consequently became an important and contentious topic. The scope of nationalism surrounding the establishment of Indonesia and other “new” countries was all-encompassing; it is therefore important to focus on the cultural aspect of nationalism, and more specifically nationalism in music. Thomas Turino defines cultural nationalism as “the use of art and other cultural practices to develop or maintain national sentiment for political purposes.”¹ It differs from political nationalism in that it is more concerned about the “distinctiveness of the cultural community as essence” of the nation, than the establishment of political structure and “representative state” of the nation.² The term and concept “musical nationalism” is commonly used to describe the musical traditions of nineteenth century Western Europe, especially the efforts of non-German composers to break away from the hegemony of “Germanism” by accentuating the uniqueness of their respective countries.³ In the case of new nation-states in the twentieth century, it is more helpful to follow Turino’s description of the presence of cultural nationalism as more than an induced patriotic sentiment, a means for dealing with what he called the “twin paradoxes of nationalism”: that nation-states

¹ Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.

² Kosaku Yoshino, Introduction to *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: a Sociological Enquiry* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.

³ Michael Murphy, *Musical Constructions of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture, 1800-1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 11.

simultaneously celebrate, and are threatened by, both cosmopolitanism and localism,⁴ which could as well describe the emergence of musical nationalism in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the beginning of musical nationalism among modern composers is strongly connected to the substantial rise of cultural nationalism, as people celebrated their newfound freedom and national pride following Indonesia's independence. One more direct cause, however, was the Japanese ban on Western influences and ideas in music during the occupation, which had forced composers to find local inspiration. This effort did not stop even after the Japanese left the country, but rather got carried on, freely and with alacrity, by local composers. As cultural practitioners, composers at the time would also be very aware of the important questions raised by the cultural debate, and of the efforts made to discuss the "Indonesian national culture" through congresses and culture journals—some of them might have even participated in the debate. All of the above factors helped to explain Amir Pasaribu's motivations to compose the way he did.

Pasaribu's approach to fusing Western musical idioms and Indonesian traditional elements in classical music—or art music, as Pasaribu himself preferred to call it—was arguably unprecedented by other Indonesian composers. All of his music instructors, including James Zwaart who taught him composition, were foreign musicians. Yet, Pasaribu was a musicologist who cared deeply about the diverse traditional and folkloric traditions of Indonesia, and had written extensively about systematic cultural preservation. In finding his own style of composing that combined his diverse knowledge and interests, it is possible that Pasaribu took composers who

⁴ Turino, 15-16.

worked with folkloric material, for example Smetana and Kodaly, as role models in musical nationalism. Pasaribu wrote about both composers and their works very positively in his essays, emphasizing the duty to explore and reflect the “folk” as an inseparable part of a composer’s identity. On describing the efforts of Zoltan Kodaly and Bela Bartok, Hungarian composers who collected thousands of Hungarian folk songs and wrote new music based on the folkloric elements, Pasaribu commented: “An artist digs [inspiration] from his people. His creation is the heartbeat, blood, and breath, as well as the pronunciation of the people’s soul on a higher degree. He looks at the effort as part of the task as an artist: the only task. Folkloric activities complete composing activities.”⁵ Pasaribu saw the effort of incorporating traditional elements in his music as a duty and as something very natural to do for a composer to do.

In his life, Pasaribu persisted in learning, teaching, and composing for strictly Western instruments, adding the folkloric elements in sound and ideas, rather than physical elements such as traditional instruments. Pasaribu’s educational background made him more comfortable working with the Western instruments. Western instruments could also more or less replicate the Indonesian traditional tonality, like the *Pelog* scale on the Gamelan; while the same cannot be said with Gamelan instruments and the Western diatonic tonality. The attempts to play the Indonesian national anthem *Indonesia Raya* on the gamelan, for example, had met with failure.⁶

Gending Mars that was an attempt to set a Western march to Gamelan music in

⁵ ‘Seniman menggali dari diri rakyatnya. Ciptaannya adalah denyutan darah dan napas serta pengucapan jiwa rakyatnya dalam taraf yang lebih tinggi. Dan ia melihat usaha itu sebagai tugas seniman: tugas satu-satunya. Aktivitas folklor itu melengkapi aktivitas komponis.’ Amir Pasaribu, *Analisis Musik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pantja Simpati, 1986), 167.

⁶ J. A. Dunga, “Situasi Musik Kita Sekarang dan Apresiasi Musik Angkatan Kini,” *Mimbar Indonesia*, June 2, 1951, 24, cited in Eritha Sitorus, *Amir Pasaribu: Komponis, Pendidik & Perintis Musik Klasik Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Media Kreatifa, 2009), 83.

Surakarta's court, was considered not fully representative of both musical cultures.⁷ Although Suka Hardjana in his book *Musik Kontemporer: Dulu dan Kini* (2003) has claimed that it is “mere illusion or big nonsense” if someone claimed that the encounter between Western and Indonesian music ever exists or has existed,⁸ it is hard to agree with him after reviewing Pasaribu's works. By changing the medium but keeping the traditional tonality, melody, and local inspirations, Pasaribu succeeded where other attempts had failed, and he opened the way for his successors: Trisutji Kamal, Jaya Suprana, Mochtar Embut, Ananda Sukarlan, and many more.

At the time, Pasaribu was not the only composer who had received a colonial education. Cornel Simanjuntak, J.A. Dungga, and R.A. J. Soedjasmin also graduated from the Dutch-established teacher's academy *Hollandsch-Inlandsche Kweekschool*, and composers Binsar Sitompul and Liberty Manik learned from those who did. At the time of war and national revolution, Indonesian symphony orchestras played almost exclusively Western repertoire, and Indonesian composers wrote mostly “art songs” with lyrics. The sound and structure of these songs, written by these Western-educated composers, were similar to German *Lieder* in the romantic era, only with Indonesian title and themes.⁹ Some of these songs were popularized by the “Bintang Radio” (Radio Star) singing competition in the 1950s, then categorized under “seriosa”¹⁰ music. This very genre, in fact, had made Ismail Marzuki the most widely known composer in Indonesia. Unlike most other composers who wrote songs,

⁷ Suka Hardjana, *Corat-Coret Musik Kontemporer Dulu dan Kini* (Jakarta: MSPI, 2003), 62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹ Suka Hardjana, “Musik Seriosa, Riwayatmu Doeloe,” *GATRA*, July 13, 2001, <http://arsip.gatra.com/artikel.php?id=8045>.

¹⁰ Derived from “serious,” the term *seriosa* was applied to singing technique similar to classical singing. The term was said to be “imported” by none other than Amir Pasaribu.

however, Pasaribu mostly focused on writing instrumental music without lyrics, which allowed him to experiment with sounds, techniques, and musical forms in his creations. Composer-pianist Ananda Sukarlan commented that Pasaribu's contemporaries such as Marzuki created beautiful pieces, but all sounded "Western." In Pasaribu's hands, the techniques of Ravel and Debussy were applied in the local context, creating pieces with strong Indonesian nuance.¹¹

Pasaribu have composed longer pieces for orchestra and piano, but most of them are missing. The shorter pieces, however, were preserved because they were published almost monthly in culture journals such as *Zenith*, *Mimbar Indonesia*, *SIASAT*, and others. Such journals could only contain shorter pieces because of the page limit.¹² Pasaribu never specified the year these compositions were written, so the information about year composed came from the publication year of the journals in which they were featured. Among the completed pieces that Sukarlan owns are: *Olé-olé Melojo-lojo* (1949), *Variasi Sriwidjaja* (1950), *The Juggler's Meeting (Tukang Sulat di Pasar Tanah Abang)*, *Bongkok's Bamboo Flute (Orpheus in de dessa)*, *Petruk Gareng dan Bagong (Badinerie)*, *Berceuse (from Suite Villageoise)*, *Sonata No. 1*, and *Indyhiang* (1951).¹³

The Western influence that Pasaribu acquired in his education is apparent in his compositions. He expressed his affinity for French music, specifically the music of Debussy, Ravel, and Rameau. This is reflected in his impressionist creations,

¹¹ Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, "Amir, Sang Maestro," *TEMPO*, February 15, 2009, 63.

¹² Eritha Sitorus, *Amir Pasaribu: Komponis, Pendidik & Perintis Musik Klasik Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Media Kreatifa, 2009), 91.

¹³ For the complete list of Sukarlan's collections that were shared with the author, and the descriptions Pasaribu wrote on the cover pages, refer to Table I in the Appendix.

which employ many novel techniques such as polytonality, whole-tone scale, uncommon time signatures, and unconventional modes—in Pasaribu’s case, the occasional use of Javanese *pelog* and *slendro* Gamelan modes. His piano pieces use the concept of character pieces: they are written for solo piano, and express a specific mood or non-musical idea. Most pieces are in ternary form, in that they consist of several contrasting themes and usually end with a restatement of the main theme by use of *Da Capo al fine* or *Da Capo al coda*. More Western influence can be seen in the fact that Pasaribu named his pieces in three languages: English, Indonesian and French. He often included a short description in English about the inspiration behind the piece.

The piece *Petruk Gareng dan Bagong* (Petruk Gareng, and Bagong), for example, had a subtitle “*Badinerie*,” a French word meaning “jest,” that is best known in classical music as the final movement of Bach’s *Orchestral Suite No. 2*. Pasaribu took the duple pattern and playful temperament of a *Badinerie*, discarded the delicateness with tempo signature *Allegro Barbaro Primitivo*, and used these structures to evoke images of Petruk, Gareng, and Bagong—three out of the four *panakawan* in the Javanese shadow puppet (*wayang*) tradition who are, in fact, jesters of the *wayang* play. The polytonal melody, playful with its dotted rhythm but at the same time unsettling with the chromatic descending thirds in the middle section, also features several phrases that are distinctly *pelog*, as a constant reminder of the “Javanese-ness” of the characters depicted. As such, piano pieces by Amir Pasaribu combined the concepts and techniques of the Western classical tradition with local inspiration to create the new Indonesian sound.

His folkloric inspirations were drawn not only musically, from folk tunes and other form of arts such as the Javanese gamelan and the Portuguese-influenced *Keroncong* music, but also in the form of imageries and soundscapes of rural and urban areas of Indonesia, from the paddy fields in West Sumatra in *Olé-olé Melojolojo*, to the busy market in the capital in *The Juggler's Meeting*. When Pasaribu was working for Sticusa, the institute of cultural exchange between the Netherlands and Indonesia, he was sent to areas in Indonesia to study the development of traditional music.¹⁴ Pasaribu also wrote a fieldwork observation article about the *lenong* folk theater culture in Jakarta.¹⁵ According to Pasaribu, Indonesian composers are lucky to be born in a land rich in traditional cultures. This exposure not only compelled Pasaribu to write many articles about culture preservation, but also inspired his compositions.

Today, almost all Indonesian art music composers incorporate folkloric elements in their music, as a way to express their musical nationalism—to evoke those familiar sounds and images they call “home.” For Pasaribu, however, more than a creative output, it was a timely statement—a reaction to the Great Debate, a persuasion to his opponents, and encouragement to his peers. He did so by brilliantly combining the two seemingly-incompatible elements, the traditional expressions, and the Western musical techniques. To illustrate this effort of Pasaribu, I have chosen to

¹⁴ Sitorus, 65.

¹⁵ Keith Foulcher, “Community and the Metropolis: *Lenong*, *Nyai Dasima* and the new New Order”, *NUS Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series*, No. 20 (2004): 2.

analyze one of his pieces composed in 1949 or 1950,¹⁶ the years between the two culture congresses, *Variasi Sriwidjaja* (also known as *Sriwijaya Variations*).

Sriwijaya Variations

J.A. Dungga, a music scholar and Pasaribu's colleague, wrote about the first time he heard the piece in an article titled "*Badut-Badut Sekitar Seni Musik Indonesia*" (Clowns Surrounding Indonesian Music), published in *Mimbar Indonesia* in 1951. He complained about how culture scholars who participated in the cultural debate talked about music only in the context of nationalism, patriotism, and "back-door" politics, without ever discussing it from a musicological perspective. Similar to Pasaribu's opinions, Dungga thought the debate about "national music" should be left to music scholars. When he expressed these concerns to Pasaribu, Pasaribu replied, "Let culture experts talk and claw each other on paper's surface—let us quietly work; come hear my composition." Dungga was moved by the music he heard, and consoled by the fact that the development in Indonesian music actually does not ever stop.¹⁷ During the years between the two cultural congresses, Pasaribu wrote about how traditional music and art music inspire each other in the development of the national music:

"The wealth of [our] country's music gives fresh blood to art music, which is developing with all consequences of international, modern living. For Indonesia, it has just started. As long as we are willing to start

¹⁶ Sitorus, 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-82.

by not much talking, but by doing, the richness of our traditional music will be mirrored in Indonesia's modern music.”¹⁸

Just as he asked his readers to put words into actions, Pasaribu was also actively composing during the years between the first two cultural congresses. *Sriwijaya Variations* is one of his works that were composed during this time, as a unique reaction to the cultural debate.

The tune that became the improvised theme in *Sriwijaya Variations* is *Gending Sriwijaya*, a folk tune from the South Sumatra province. In an article titled “The Paradoxical and Nostalgic History of ‘Gending Sriwijaya’ in South Sumatra,” Margaret Kartomi explained about the origin of the tune and why a tune from Sumatra would have a Javanese *pelog* quality. It was composed fairly recently by a team of artists during the Japanese occupation in 1945, and reflects the nostalgia for the glory days of the ancient Sriwijaya kingdom. The tune, as indicated by the term *gending* that refers to a gamelan composition, was inspired by the Javanese gamelan music. More specifically, the influence can be traced to the *kromongan* ensemble in the Palembang palace, which was heavily influenced by the gamelan music from the Demak kingdom of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ In the article, Kartomi included a transcription of *Gending Sriwijaya* transcribed for solo piano, played by Mochtar Embut in 1975. While the arranger of this arrangement is unidentified, it is very likely that it was Pasaribu, given the similarities of this simple piano arrangement with that

¹⁸ ‘Kekayaan musik negeri memberi darah segar bagi musik seni yang sedang berkembang dengan segala konsekuensi hidup modern internasional. Bagi Indonesia hal itu baru mulai. Asal kita mau memulai dengan tidak banyak bicara, tapi dengan berbuat, maka kekayaan musik daerah kita akan tercermin dalam seni musik Indonesia modern.’ Amir Pasaribu, *Analisis Musik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pantja Simpati, 1986), 96-97.

¹⁹ Margaret J. Kartomi, “The Paradoxical and Nostalgic History of ‘Gending Sriwijaya’ in South Sumatra,” *Archipelago*, Volume 45 (1993): 37-50.

of the main theme of *Sriwijaya Variations*. In addition, Pasaribu had also included an arrangement of *Gending Sriwijaya* in his songbook of simple arrangements, “Lagu-Lagu Lama Solo Piano I” (Old Songs [for] Solo Piano I) which was popular at the time it was published in 1952.²⁰

In *Sriwijaya Variations*, Pasaribu took only the third and fourth line of *Gending Sriwijaya*, and used it as the main theme. This theme is followed by six variations, each repeated once before going to the next one, and clustered into three bigger themes. This clustering is made apparent not only by the key signatures and modes, but also by style, interpretation, and influence, as indicated by the composer himself in the cover page (in English):

“The theme of the Sriwijaya variations is a song from Palembang,
Var. I and II are written in modern style
Var III expresses heroism and optimism in life
Var IV expresses the serene feeling of accepting life as it comes and
taking things as they are.
Var. V and VI on a mixture of Kroncong music and the rhythm that of
the beating of drums in the kampung.”²¹

These descriptions inform the performers about the inspiration behind each variations—yet leave a lot of room for open interpretation.

Pelog is a seven pitch, non-equidistant tuning system in the Javanese gamelan.²² To understand the *pelog* scale quickly and easily, classically trained musicians often heuristically match the solfege of the seven *pelog* tones with that of the diatonic scale.²³ While this method does not take into account the differences

²⁰ Sitorus, 43.

²¹ Copy of *Sriwijaya Variations* original manuscript, in possession of author.

²² Henry Spiller, *Focus: Gamelan music of Indonesia*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2008), 78.

²³ The chart “Correspondence of *pelog* with solfege syllables” can be reviewed in Spiller, 78.

between the Javanese and Western tuning, it is helpful for learning and, in this case, inserting gamelan influences in Western-style instrumental music.

Not all seven tones of the *pelog* scale are used in a piece; emphases are put on five selected main pitches in a subset called *pathet* (Javanese: ‘to restrain’).²⁴ There are three *pathet* for the *pelog* scale. For the purpose of this analysis we will focus on the *pelog pathet barang*, a subset with descending main pitches 7-6-5-3-2, which translates to the solfege *sol-fa-mi-do-ti*.

A rearrangement of this pentatonic *pelog* scale, by setting “do” as the tonal center, resulted in a scale similar to the diatonic major scale, with omitted second and sixth. This resulted in pieces that, by those with Western ears, are heard as being in a diatonic major mode; and experienced with similar feelings, moods, and other extramusical contents that are associated with a major mode. This “major - rearranged *pelog* scale” appeared in many Indonesian piano compositions, such as “Tembang Alit” in F major by Jaya Suprana, and “The Dancer” in B major by Levi Gunardi, both written in the late twentieth century. Pasaribu was most likely the first composer to use this modified *pelog* mode in *Sriwijaya Variations* (1949-1950).



Figure I. *Adagio Contemplative*, Sriwijaya Variations

²⁴ Ibid., 83.

Pasaribu's fascination with Bach is shown in the first statement of the theme, tempo-marked *Adagio Contemplative* (Figure I). The melody, arranged in a polyphonic style with the original *pelog* melody played on the right hand. The theme consists of two melodic "sentences," structured similarly—quarter notes in the first half of the melodic line, followed by a series of eighth notes. In the second measure, the suspended F resolving to E as leading tone B resolves to C formed the tritone resolution; by expanding the augmented fourth interval to minor sixth, the chord progresses from V7 to I. Interestingly, this common Western harmonic progression is done rather smoothly within the boundaries of the *pelog* mode by utilizing all the primary five tones and setting C as the tonal center, as would be expected in pieces set in a diatonic major scale.

As if to shift into a strikingly otherworldly ambience that "disoriented" the listeners, Pasaribu wrote the first and second variations in "modern style." The melody, as the top notes of the right hand part, was kept unaltered. Chromatic clusters parallel this melody on quarter and eighth notes, and whole-tone scales and arpeggiated augmented chords fill in the gaps between melodic segments. The first variation is ended with a pattern on the right hand similar to one in the polyphonic theme, but in the odd augmented A-flat chord instead of C major.

In the second variation, the break between the two melodic sentences is lengthened by a passage of five octave-groups of whole-tone scales, spanning across three registers. The whole-tone series reappears after the first half (quarter notes) of the second sentence, now only with three octave-groups, and is written without not under the control of the 4/4 time signature; the time of measure 24 is longer than what

a measure would allow—indicating the free-time, quasi-cadenza quality of this ornamental passage. The tonal disorientation is now added with time disorientation.



Figure II. Measures 23-25, Variation II, *Andantino*. Copy of original manuscript.

These disorientations were resolved, however, when the dissonant tone clusters arrived at a tonal familiarity in the last measure of the second variation: a C major chord.

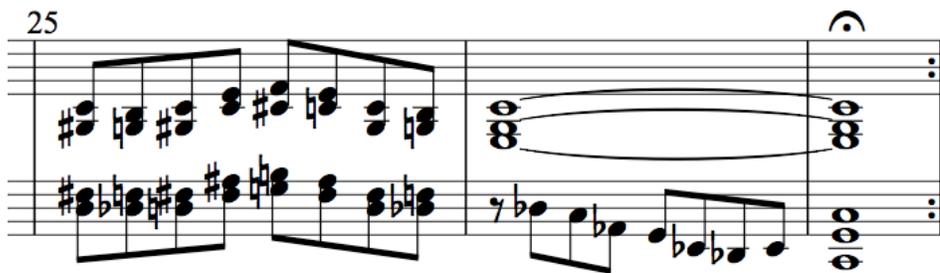


Figure III. Last three measures of Variation II, *Andantino*.

The third variation, starts with the same tone as in previous variations, E—the G# and other accompanying tones that shortly followed, however, clarified that E is now the tonic of the third variation. We have been introduced to a new scale: the *pelog* in E major. Even when the main pitches are still distinctly *pelog*, E-G#-A-B-D# (*do-mi-fa-so-si*), the use of *pelog* scale in the third variation is not rigid—the

harmonic structure provided by left hand's arpeggiated chords also include a diminished chord on measure 30. The theme is altered from the original one, retaining the quarter note-eighth note pattern and much of the melodic contour, but adding a harmonic twist near the end. This variation is also written in the two versus three polyrhythm, with the left hand part being mostly triplets (Figure II).

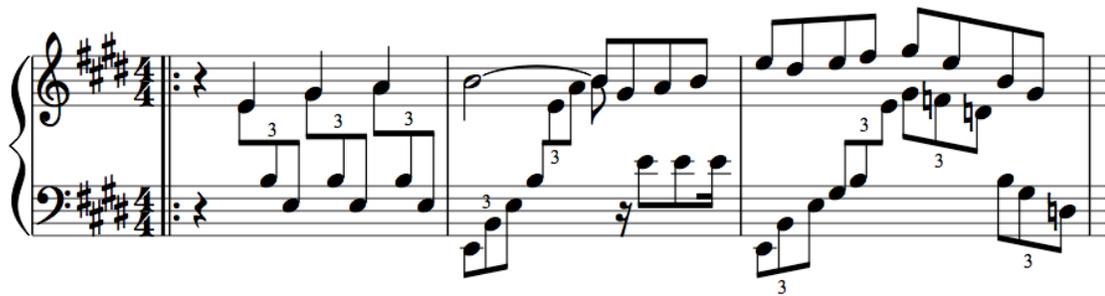


Figure IV. Variation III, *Allegro Eroico*, Measures 28-30.

The triplet figures carry on to the next variation where, still in *pelog* E major, the left hand starts with a statement of the theme in the bass line. The improvised theme as melody that follows this statement keeps ascending, gets taken over by the right hand, and reaches the peak at high A6—a catharsis, that would be followed by a rolling *pelog* IV9 arpeggiation on the left hand. The blocked quarter-note chords in measure 41-43 are all based on IV7 chord. In this variation, Pasaribu was able to utilize the seventh and ninth chords (more specifically I7 and IV7 and IV9) to create a very special nuance; the chords brought with them a hint of jazz, but at the same time they sound easily Javanese, because this variation does not at all contain other tones than the ones specified by the *pelog* scale (Figure IVa). The ending chord of E major is embellished with grace notes, which resulted in the resemblance of a typical melodic line of a traditional bamboo flute (Figure IVb).

a. Measure 41

b. Measure 44 and 45.

Figure V. Variation IV, *Adagio Molto*

The scale of E major and the triplets are shared by the third and the fourth variations, clustering them as a separate entity from the other four variations. Even so, Pasaribu created a deliberate contrast in mood between the two variations. Variation III is tempo-marked *Allegro Eroico*, and supposed to evoke “heroism and optimism,” while variation IV is set in a much slower tempo, *Adagio molto*, played with tranquility and elegance. It seems that Pasaribu was trying to demonstrate how broad is the range of expression that the *pelog* tonality can create. In addition, through these variations, Pasaribu was expressing his views on life—that one is supposed to have not only courage and optimism, but also peace from “accepting life as it comes and taking things as they are.”

Variations V and VI, back in C major, show the whimsical side of Pasaribu, and these variations are sure to tickle the fancy of Indonesian performers of this piece. The mention of “*Kroncong* music” in a classical piano piece is unheard of, especially by the generation of Indonesians today. To understand why this is the case, it is important to briefly go over what *Kroncong* music is, and how the public perceive this art form. *Kroncong* is “the generic term for popular, sentimental songs,” widely known to have been introduced in the sixteenth century by the Portuguese

settlers. This music came to Jakarta in the late the nineteenth century, and spread to the central Javanese cities where it was mixed with gamelan music during the twentieth century.²⁵ During Pasaribu’s time, *kroncong* was ubiquitous and became the pan-Indonesian musical representation of Indonesia. Nowadays, young people consider *Kroncong* music old-fashioned and do not wish to be associated with it.²⁶ In both eras, *Kroncong* as popular music and classical or “art” music are viewed as existing in two very different worlds—yet Pasaribu was able to put them together.

A *kroncong* ensemble typically consists of a singer, a guitar, ukuleles, a flute, a violin, a cello played entirely in pizzicato style and a string bass. The dynamic background rhythm underneath the slower-moving melody is created by the interlocking harmonic accompaniments, played by melodic instruments: plucked cello, guitar, ukulele and plucked bass, on or off the beat.

In the fifth variation of *Sriwijaya Variations*, tempo-marked *Allegro di Krontjong*, the harmonic structure that support the unaltered theme is reduced to two simple chords: I and IV. The left hand part holds a rhythm-keeping role, but is also oscillating in a wide range of tones. Based also on the register, Pasaribu’s inspiration for this part might have been the plucked cello part in *kroncong* music.

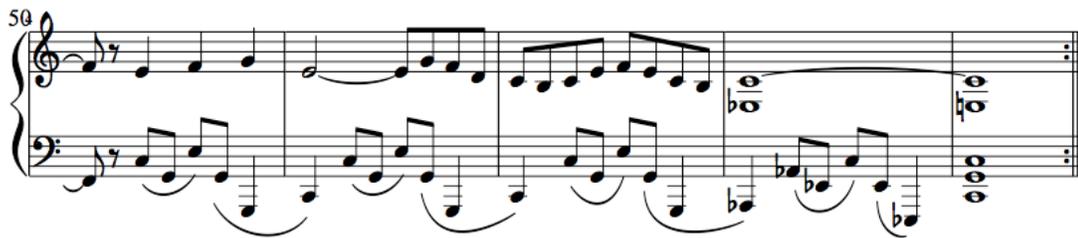


Figure VI. Variation V, *Allegro di Krontjong*, Measures 50-54 (second line).

²⁵ Judith Becker, “Kroncong, Indonesian Popular Music”, *Asian Music* vol. 7, no. 1 (1975): 14-19.

²⁶ “Christmas the Time to Preserve Keroncong Tugu Music,” *Jakarta Post*, December 22, 2010, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/12/22/christmas-time-preserve-keroncong-tugu-music.html>.

Entering the sixth variation, now in 2/4 time signature and tempo-marked *Vivacissimo*, the theme on the right hand is altered to imitate the flute in a *kroncong* ensemble, with its rapid melodic twist and turns. What was a series of quarter notes is now eighth notes, and the series of eighth notes is now sixteenth notes. Instead of two melodic lines, this variation has three (Figure VI).



Figure VII. Theme of Variation VI, *Vivacissimo*.

The harmonic progression, still only consisting of only I and IV, changes more rapidly to support the altered melody. Both variations V and VI are closed by an unusual cadence, straying momentarily to A-flat before returning to C.

At the time it was written, *Sriwijaya Variations* was a unique and unprecedented creation. By employing the Western musical form of “variations on a theme” and using it to rearrange a *pelog* folk tune, Pasaribu was able to show how different musical styles and influences could be incorporated into a Western-style “art music” that sounds nothing but Indonesian. This compositional idea goes along with

his response to the Great Debate: that the new Indonesian National Culture should be a mix of all the different influences the society embraced; the local and the international, the “East” and “West,” the traditional and the modern. It *is* possible.

Conclusion

Suriname Years

The stay in Suriname was planned to be a two-year contract, but ended up elongated to almost three decades. In this former Dutch colony in South America, Pasaribu taught cello and piano at the *Cultureel Centrum Suriname*, and worked as a Dutch civil worker as an expatriate. He was asked to lead the Suriname Philharmonic Orchestra, which was not in a prime condition; the leader was old and sick, and they only had one cellist, who was already hunching. Because of his mastery of many languages, he also worked at the notary office *Oostvriesland* in the capital Paramaribo, and was often called by the Paramaribo hospital to help translate when they treated Japanese or Korean ship crewmen. Because a deferred compensation was taken from his salary for a pension fund, Pasaribu was still receiving pension money from the *Algemeen Burgerlijk Pensioenfonds* (“National Civil Pension Fund”) in the Netherlands until he passed away.¹

In Suriname, Pasaribu’s life was filled with painful losses. In 1968, not long after their arrival, his youngest son Fauzi passed away. In 1980, his wife Siti Noerana and son Iwan died. According to his son Nurman, Pasaribu had a relationship with a Surinamese lady that did not last long, because he preferred to live alone.

¹ The details of Amir Pasaribu’s life in Suriname were mostly shared by his son, Nurman Pasaribu. Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, "Amir, Sang Maestro," *TEMPO*, February 15, 2009, 56.

Overdue Accolades

In 1990, Nurman, Irman, and Erwin, who live in the Netherlands, received a message from relatives in Paramaribo, asking them to take care of their aging father. Pasaribu decided to go back to his hometown in 1995, where the Pasaribu families and an in-home caregiver were ready to care for him. He settled in Medan and became an importer of Petrof piano from the Czech Republic. His sons and grandchildren from the Netherlands visited him every time they went to Indonesia.

Two days before the celebration of Indonesia's independence day in 2002, President Megawati Soekarnoputri awarded the *Bintang Budaya Paradharmas* Medal of Honor, the highest honor in the field of culture, to Amir Pasaribu, the "composer and creator of marches." In her biography about Pasaribu, Sitorus (2009) speculated that people who had read about this bestowal might have wondered who Pasaribu was, or have never heard of his name before. She compared Pasaribu's anonymity to Teuku Jacob, a prominent anthropologist who received another presidential medal of honor in the same year, whose name was featured in the title of the newspaper article about all recipients: "*Bintang Mahaputra Nararya* for Prof. Dr. Teuku Jacob."² In fact, Pasaribu might be the least known among other composers who received this particular honor: Sandiah "Bu Kasur" (awarded in 1992), and A.T. Mahmud (awarded in 2003), who were both well-known composers of children's songs.

The classical music society in Indonesia acknowledged Pasaribu around the same time. To celebrate its 50th anniversary, the *Yayasan Pendidikan Musik* (Foundation of Music Education), said to be the first and oldest classical music school

² Eritha Sitorus, *Amir Pasaribu: Komponis, Pendidik & Perintis Musik Klasik Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Media Kreatifa, 2009), 1-2.

in Indonesia, inaugurated the “Amir Pasaribu Concert Hall” in the YPM Bintaro building. The director of the YPM music school, Irvati M. Sudiarso, was a student at the Den Haag Conservatory when she met Pasaribu in the house of a mutual friend, the pianist Charlotte Sutisno. Irvati received Pasaribu’s manuscript of *Sriwijaya Variations* and *Indyhiang*, and premiered both pieces in the United States.³

The YPM music school requires students on the sixth level and the Pre-Conservatory III level to perform a mandatory piece, composed by an Indonesian composer, in the final examination. Pasaribu’s pieces *The Juggler’s Meeting*, *Puisi Bagor*, *Berceuse*, and *Sriwijaya Variations* have been selected as mandatory pieces. For pieces by Indonesian composers, the school usually issues a stamped copy of the handwritten manuscripts for each student, and forbids the making and distributing of copies outside of the institution. As such, the distribution of Pasaribu’s music became very limited to exclusive and protective circles. Many alumni of the YPM music school who became professional musicians, such as Ananda Sukarlan, Levi Gunardi, and Nadya Janitra, first learned Pasaribu’s pieces during their time in the YPM music school. They still play Pasaribu’s pieces in their concerts today, but no videos or recordings of their performance are ever distributed online. The only recording of Pasaribu’s music available commercially is the CD by Ananda Sukarlan.

Farewell

When in Medan one summer, Gonny Pasaribu brought with her Sukarlan’s recordings of Pasaribu’s music. Pasaribu was almost completely deaf, yet he always

³ Ismi Wahid, “Sriwijaya Untuk Seorang Sahabat,” *TEMPO*, January 27, 2011, <http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2011/01/27/112309310/Sriwijaya-untuk-Seorang-Sahabat>.

refused to use hearing aids. Gonny put the portable CD player really close to her grandfather's ear.⁴ Pasaribu exclaimed, upon hearing his compositions played by Sukarlan, "This is wonderful!"⁵

In an interview with reporters from TEMPO in February 2009, Pasaribu admitted that he still had many dreams that are difficult to achieve. "My fate limited me to what I was able to do, which was practical music. Because even if I write the music, there is no materialization. For example [music for] choir or orchestra. [I] must "shake hand" left and right first, before I can do it."⁶ After a brief contemplation, he mumbled, "I don't have a cello." His nurse Lasmini then whispered, Pasaribu really wanted to have a cello.

Amir Pasaribu, the pioneer of Indonesian art music, passed away in Medan on 10 February 2010, at 94 years old. He left in his legacy numerous essays, books, musical ideas, and beautiful music. His endeavors and dedication in the musical world had set foundations for the new Indonesian sound, and paved the way for Indonesian musicians, composers, educators, and music scholars of the future who are inspired to express their national identity within the context of the global integration of modern music.

⁴ Gonny Pasaribu, E-mail to the author, March 22, 2012.

⁵ Gonny Pasaribu, "Pengantar", liner notes to *Piano Works of Amir Pasaribu*, Ananda Sukarlan, Chendra Panatan CD, 2007.

⁶ 'Nasib saya masih terkungkung oleh kesempatan yang bisa saya tempuh, yaitu dalam musik praktis. Sebab, walaupun dikarang musiknya, tidak ada konkretnya. Misalnya, kor ataupun orkes. Mesti *tabe* dulu ke kanan-kiri untuk bisa.' Amir Pasaribu, quoted in Kurie Suditomo, Sita P. Aquadini, and Soetana M. Hasibuan, 58.

Author's Notes

My experiences conducting research on Pasaribu's life are filled with many revelations, I hope by explaining some of them I can shed light on how this thesis came about, and what unseen circumstances arise when conducting research of this kind.

I was once a long-time student at the YPM music school, where Pasaribu's name was known among upper-level students and teachers mainly as the composer of "this year's mandatory Indonesian piece." Every year, the jury board for the graduating levels examination in YPM decides a mandatory piece by an Indonesian composer. After the examination, they award a "Prize for Good Interpretation in a Piece by an Indonesian Composer: [title of piece] by [composer's name]," along with the many awards for students' performance and academic achievements. All other levels still have final examinations, but without a mandatory Indonesian piece.

It occurred to me that students get to play pieces by Pasaribu and other Indonesian composers only when they are at a "graduating level," either the sixth level or pre-conservatory III level. There is this unwritten convention that teachers do not typically assign their students pieces by Indonesian composers for a "regular" examination; instead, they assign pieces by various "Western" composers, from Albeniz, McDowell, to Rachmaninoff, as the required character pieces. Usually in January the school announces the mandatory pieces for the two graduating levels, and the manuscripts, issued by the school, seem to be taken out from a hidden archive somewhere. I found out the hard way that, on a regular day, one cannot just go to the music school library and ask to see Pasaribu's pieces for research purposes, even

when it is the “mandatory piece” of that year, and even when the person asking is a YPM alumna. Most of it is about copyright, which is understandable—but I was baffled again with how much easier was it for me to get the manuscripts from the international artist Ananda Sukarlan, than from my former music school.

I also still do not know what to make out of this special categorization for Indonesian pieces. On one hand, YPM is admired for constantly introducing Indonesian pieces to its students, and to the general public through concerts; on the other hand, this goes to show that in music institutions, these Indonesian pieces are not yet seen as being in the same standard as the Western pieces. A conversation with an American friend made me realize that in many countries, even in the USA, it is never a surprise that pieces by Chopin and Debussy are better known and more frequently played than pieces from the countries’ own composers. But why? Do proximity and similarity *not* attract in the realm of music, do people not get drawn to music that reminds them of their culture, their people, and their idyllic hometown sceneries?

When I graduated from YPM and stepped outside of the “bubble,” I realized that Pasaribu’s pieces are not played in most other classical music institutions and classical music concerts. This is similar to what was experienced by Nadya Janitra, a YPM alumna and young Indonesian pianist who studies piano in the Netherlands. When she performed in three major cities in Java: Jakarta, Jogjakarta, and Surabaya, she noticed that most of her audience, laymen and pianists alike, had never heard *Sriwijaya Variations* before. Those who knew the piece were “Indonesian music

specialists and fanatics, or YPM students.”⁷ The obscurity of Pasaribu is not just for the music—bits and pieces of Pasaribu’s life that I knew from being a YPM student were not told anywhere else, until Sitorus published her book in 2009. From performing in front of my culturally-Javanese aunt and uncles, to performing in my senior recital at Wesleyan, I noticed that Indonesian piano music from the previous century is still considered a novelty. I found a thesis topic that is most suitable, given my musical background. Through Facebook, I got in contact with Ananda Sukarlan and Gonny Pasaribu, who have been extremely accommodating to the needs of an undergraduate thesis writer.

In Indonesia, I keep hearing that Indonesian composers are not appreciated, and that the cultural history of Indonesia is not given the same amount of attention as the social and political history. I hope it will change, and I hope this thesis will contribute, even if in a very small way, to this change.

⁷ Nadya Janitra, e-mail to the author, April 10, 2012.

Appendix

Table I

Some of Ananda Sukarlan's collection of Pasaribu's manuscripts for piano, that the author received from Ananda Sukarlan (through Chendra Panatan).

Title of Piece	Year Composed/Published	Description
Olé-olé Melojo-lojo	February 2, 1949, published in <i>Zenith</i> , June 1952 ¹	This piano piece will bring you to a mountainous scenery in West Sumatera, <u>Ole-ole</u> is a kind of flute, consisting of a paddy reed, with a conical end in the shape of a funnel, made from coconut leaves wound spirally. <u>Melojo-lojo</u> is winding roads up and down through golden paddy fields, a train of buffalo-carts moves along the roads; bells are hanging in the roofs of the carts. In the midst of the fields sits the paddy-watcher in his little bamboo-shelter, with his flute. This piano piece begins with the heavy tread of the buffalos, and later you will hear the bells of the moving carts and the flute of the guard.
Bongkok's Bamboo Flute (Orpheus in de dessa/Si Bongkok dengan Sulingja)	September 17, 1949, published in <i>Zenith</i> , January 1953.	This is inspired by Augusta de Wit's book, <i>Orpheus in the Village</i> . In this piece you will hear the flute of our hunchback, hypnotizing an iguana (that is a big lizard).
Variasi Sriwidjaja (Sriwijaya Variations)	1949-1950	The theme of the Sriwijaya variations is a song from Palembang, Var. I and II are written in modern style, Var III expresses heroism and optimism in life, Var IV expresses the serene feeling of accepting life as it comes and taking things as they are. Var. V and VI on a mixture of Kroncong music and the rhythm that of the beating of drums in the kampung.
Indyhiang	1951 ²	
The Juggler's Meeting (Tukang Sulap di Pasar Tanah Abang)		You will hear the shrill tunes of the snake charmer's flute, keeping the snake in a continuous motion.
Kesan (Impressie)		
Sampaniara I (Getek		(no cover page)

¹ Eritha Sitorus, *Amir Pasaribu: Komponis, Pendidik & Perintis Musik Klasik Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Media Kreatifa, 2009), 60.

² "Musical Excerpts," *RMA Music*, <http://www.rmamusic.com/Recording.htm>.

Silam Kali Ancol)		
Sampaniara II (Tante-Tante Mau Ngebut) (Waterski)!!!		
Tjapung Ketjimpung di Tjikapundung		Tjapung is the name of a dragonfly. Tjikapundung is the name of a mountain river, passing Lembang and flowing through Bandung. In a bend of this river a beautiful nymph is playing and splashing, she enjoys being alone in the open air, but soon a dragonfly discovers her and feasts his eyes upon her beauty. He jumps in the water (on the piano you hear the “glissando”) and begins a flirtation with the girl. The mode is Sundanese.
Ball-Dance of River-Fish-Princess		
Petruk Gareng dan Bagong (Badinerie)		Hop-sotch ballet by the three clowns from the wajang play. Tragedy of the clowns who have to make people laugh, but their hearts are full of sadness.
Rabanara Dances 1-6	Published by <i>Bagian Penerbitan Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakjat</i> , Jakarta, in 1961. ³	
Berceuse (dari Suite Villageoise)		(Stamped and distributed by the YPM Music School)
VIII. Berceuse		
Puisi Bagor		(Stamped and distributed by the YPM Music School)

³ “Rabanara Dances : piano solos,” Worldcat.org, <http://www.worldcat.org/title/rabanara-dances-piano-solos/oclc/64053376>.

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