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## Tepa Selira Culture in the Art of Karawitan

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### Abstract

Karawitan is a part of the Javanese culture that was born because of the needs and demands of the aesthetic sense of music from the supporting community as a manifestation and crystallization of the aesthetic sense of the Javanese community. The system of values and historical experience of Javanese society in its journey has influenced the Javanese culture which eventually formed the identity of Javanese society expressed in Javanese traditional music (Karawitan). Karawitan art has passed natural selection by society and its era until it has ethical values and offers high aesthetic taste. Surakarta traditional Karawitan places the rhythm as the most important element in a gending performance led by kendang as pamurba irama. Pamurba means the leader who is responsible for regulating the gending breath and also giving life to it and leading other instruments working together to create a harmonious gending performance. There is a typical musical leadership character of Karawitan so that the leadership character in Karawitan is very different from other musical traditions, especially western music (orchestra) called tepa selira. In leading Karawitan, kendang serves as a pamong or aligner that should promote the culture of tepa selira in leading Karawitan performance. Karawitan tradition does not recognize the self-projection in the performance which means that each gamelan drummer must develop tepa selira attitude that there will be no chaos in the performance of Karawitan's volume.

**Keywords:** Art of Karawitan, Tepa Selira Culture

### Abstrak

Karawitan adalah bagian dari budaya Jawa yang lahir karena kebutuhan dan tuntutan rasa estetika musik dari komunitas pendukung sebagai manifestasi dan kristalisasi rasa estetika masyarakat Jawa. Sistem nilai dan pengalaman historis masyarakat Jawa dalam perjalanannya telah mempengaruhi budaya Jawa yang akhirnya membentuk identitas masyarakat Jawa yang diekspresikan dalam musik tradisional Jawa (Karawitan). Seni Karawitan telah melewati seleksi alam oleh masyarakat dan zamannya hingga memiliki nilai-nilai etis dan menawarkan cita rasa estetika yang tinggi. Karawitan tradisional Surakarta menempatkan ritme sebagai elemen terpenting dalam penampilan gending yang dipimpin oleh kendang sebagai pamurba irama. Pamurba berarti pemimpin yang bertanggung jawab untuk mengatur nafas gending dan juga menghidupkannya dan memimpin instrumen lain yang bekerja bersama untuk menciptakan kinerja gending yang harmonis. Ada karakter kepemimpinan

musik khas Karawitan sehingga karakter kepemimpinan di Karawitan sangat berbeda dari tradisi musik lainnya, terutama musik barat (orkestra) yang disebut tepa selira. Dalam memimpin Karawitan, kendang berfungsi sebagai pamong atau pelurus yang harus mempromosikan budaya tepa selira dalam memimpin kinerja Karawitan. Tradisi Karawitan tidak mengakui proyeksi diri dalam pertunjukan yang berarti bahwa setiap penabuh gamelan harus mengembangkan sikap tepa selira bahwa tidak akan ada kekacauan dalam kinerja volume Karawitan.

**Kata Kunci:** Seni Karawitan, Budaya Tepa Selira

## INTRODUCTION

*Karawitan* is one of the Javanese cultures that was born because of the needs and demands of the musical aesthetic taste of the supporting community as a manifestation and crystallization of the Javanese people's aesthetic sense. The value system and historical experience of the Javanese community in its journey have influenced the Javanese culture which eventually shaped the Javanese identity which was expressed in Javanese traditional music (*Karawitan*).

The term *Karawitan* was introduced to the community around the 1920s when the Surakarta Palace established a kind of *gamelan* playing course held at Paheman Radya Pustaka (now the Radya Pustaka Museum). The value system and historical experience of the Javanese community in its journey have influenced the Javanese culture which eventually shaped the Javanese identity which was expressed in Javanese traditional music (*Karawitan*). The intended value system is certainly derived from the philosophy of the Javanese because *Karawitan* is a product of Javanese culture. It can be said that the art of *Karawitan* contains moral teachings derived from Javanese culture. These moral teachings include the culture of *tepa selira* or respect for others.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in writing this article was qualitative research while the approach used was symbolic interpretation. Symbolic interpretation is used to examine idioms in *Karawitan* which cannot be separated from the Javanese socio-cultural context in which *Karawitan* grows and develops. The concept of interpretation of Clifford Geertz was used to interpret musical performances. Geertz stated that to analyse culture is not an experimental science to find law, but an interpretive science to find a meaning (1992: 5).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Java has experienced a golden age in terms of civilization. Marcopolo refers Java as Java Major or large Javanese. Marcopolo's admiration was followed by other travellers so that at that time Java was called the biggest and the most influential island in the world. All give a major place in their stories and studies (Lombard I, 2000: 18). Java civilization produced various branches of arts that lived and developed until now, including music that was born in Java for centuries which is still alive and continues to develop both quantitatively and qualitatively until now.

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Music has successfully crossed the socio-cultural fence and various regions in the archipelago and even in the world (Supanggah, 2000: 3)

The art of *Karawitan* uses basic sound medium. Medium is a raw material in the form of sound that is used as a tool or means to express the experience of the soul or the *pengrawit* (musicians) manifested in a *gending*/composition/song with a certain rhythm. Rhythm is the most important musical element in *Karawitan*. In the context of *Karawitan* performance, a *gending* performance will not sound well if it is not presented with a good rhythm. *Tabuhan gending* is categorized as defective if it sounds not rhythmic. In Javanese language, it is called *ora* rhythm. The rhythm is the breath of *gending*. It is this rhythm that makes *gending* alive (Supanggah, 2000: 129).

The Surakarta traditional *Karawitan* places the rhythm as the most important element in a *gending* performance. In the performance of the rhythm *gending* is led by *kendang* as *pamurba irama* which is responsible for regulating the breath of *gending* as well as giving life to it. *Pamurba* means leaders who have to work together with other instruments to realize harmonious musical performances. There is a typical musical leadership character of *Karawitan* so that the leadership character in *Karawitan* is very different from other musical traditions, especially western music (orchestra). An orchestra concert is led by a conductor who uses visual codes with hand movements and sticks. The attention of the musician will be focused on the conductor other than reading the notation. It can be said that the conductor is the person most responsible for an orchestra performance.

*Kendang* as the leader or *pamurba irama* has a different role from a conductor. *Kendang* player plays more roles as *pamong* or aligners. The difference between a *kendang* player and a conductor that can be captured visually is that a conductor leads an orchestra from outside and does not play an instrument while the leader of *Karawitan* performance or a *kendang* player (hereinafter referred to as a *kendang* player) presides over musical performance while playing *kendang*. With musical idioms in the *kendang* playing, a *kendang* player leads the *Karawitan* performance while playing in it. In Javanese language, it is known as *melu nglakoni* or *melu ngayahi*. The *kendang* player gives not only a signal like a conductor but also an example of how hard the volume of *tabuhan* is, how complicated the *tabuhan* pattern is, and how fast the tempo is developed. Gradation of volume, complexity, and speed chosen by the *kendang* will be followed by other instruments. In this case, it is not justified between one instrument to another to cover each other (Javanese = *nyilep*) or to sink the volume of the partner's *tabuhan*, especially *nyilep kendang*. The *Karawitan* tradition does not recognize self-presentation in the performance. A *kendang* player must be able to lead his partners so that there is no chaos of the volume in musical performances.

A *kendang* player in determining the rhythm must see the ability and levels of the skills of other musicians. In addition, in leading the *gending* performance, a *kendang* player is fully responsible for *gending* performance and decision making to stop, finish, or to continue to other music, and responsible to see the ability of other players. The *Karawitan* tradition does not allow a *kendang* player to impose his will. If he forces his will, the *Karawitan* performance will sound out of harmony. *Gending* harmony is the full responsibility of the *gending* player until the *gending*

performance arrives at the level of *rampak* and *rempeg*. Both terms of musical aesthetics are the basic requirements or minimum standards that must be met in musical performances. *Rampak* is an aesthetic demand that is closely related to togetherness in playing together which is related to the element of speed or time. *Rempeg* is about the sense of togetherness in playing together which is related to elements of volume, space, or dynamics (Supanggah, 2000: 124).

The music performance leader, the *kendang* player, is fully responsible for the the *rampak* and the *rempeg* elements of the *tabuhan*. The *rampak* and *rempeg* are not only about togetherness, but also the dynamics presented by each instrument. Thus, every musician (*pengrawit*) must prioritize *tepa selira* or tolerance in realizing the *rampak* and *rempeg* performance that does not accentuate the sound of the instrument being played. Supanggah stated that *gendang* players sometimes can become a musician as well as a moderator, *pamomong* (a caretaker as well as a role model) by playing (*ngayahi*, *nglakoni*) while paying attention to the capacities, abilities, and skills of their partners in playing. *Kendang* also has to be responsible for *rampak* and *rempeg* elements of the *tabuhan* by looking at the context of the place, function, and time at the time the music presentation was performed (2000: 132).

The way to play *kendang* is called *ngayahi* and *nglakoni* while paying attention to the capacities, abilities, and skills of the playing musician partners is called *tepa selira* in *Karawitan*. *Tepa selira* is shown by the *kendang* player by respecting the roles of each instrument. Despite the small roles, the musical contribution of an instrument must be respected. The *kendang* player must be able to create harmonization of *tabuhan* by giving roles to other players. As a leader, the *kendang* player must provide justice to all musicians, none of whom must stand out. *Tepa selira* is indicated by the willingness to control the capacities, abilities, and skills of the playing partner musicians.

## CONCLUSION

The art of *Karawitan*, which is the product of Javanese culture, contains moral teachings, namely *tepa selira*. *Karawitan* which promotes cooperation in each *gending* performance requires a reciprocal relationship based on the same interests or feelings among group members where one's success is the success of all group members so that mutual respect and tolerance are needed which is called the *tepa selira* culture.

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