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THE INFLUENTIAL MUSICAL COMPOSITIONAL TOOLS OF MALAY POPULAR MUSIC IN MALAYSIA OF THE MID 20th AND THE EARLY 21st CENTURY

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Abstract:

In the mid-20th century, it is noteworthy that Malay popular music composed in this era was heavily influenced by various stylistic and cultural musical forms of both the traditional Malay styles such as asli, inang, joget, zapin and even keroncong, and also by Western idioms and styles. Branded as jazz ballads in the Mid-20th Century, Malay popular music is a key subject in unveiling the musical changes in the Malay popular music history of Peninsula Malaysia. In the 1960s, there was a trend to compose Malay popular music with heavily influenced idiomatic jazz harmonics in the many various Western styles. In the early 21st century, as it has musically and stylistically evolved, Malay popular music became closely associated with the continuous dissemination of patriotic songs in Malaysia as well as an amalgamation of the various trending styles of the Western hemisphere such as funk, pop, rhythm and blues, gospel and even rock music. Throughout it all, the continued and consistent harmonics of Jazz Music have been an ever-present tool for many Malay Popular Music composers since the early years of independence. This paper will focus on four chosen compositions, two from each of the time frames in focus and each tune will have an analysis from a singular compositional viewpoint, be it melodic (Gema Rembulan-Jimmy Boyle, 1956), chordal (Air Mata Berderai-Alfonso Soliano, 1964) or the dissertation of the song-form (Selingkuh Kasih-Mokhzani Ismail, 2006 & Gemilang-Aubrey Suwito, 2005). Through the analysis of the chosen musical scores, this paper intends to reintroduce and refresh the essential elements of composing a Malay Popular Music composition as well as the musical influences and changing mindsets of approach on the different compositional styles of Malay popular music, its culture, and identity, of the

mid-20th and the early 21st centuries of Malaysia to the current and future composers of this genre.

Keywords:

Malay Popular Music, Evolution of Compositional Styles, Culture, Musical Analysis, Influences

Introduction

Since the mid-20th century when Malaysia achieved its independence from the British, Malay popular music has evolved from one style to another. In the 1950s, like jazz music and rock and roll were the predominant music of the West, Malay Popular music, reflecting the many idioms and styles that the Western offered. As was, rock and roll being the forefront of all things pop in the 1950s, Malay popular music coined its term of Malay pop as 'kugiran' which stood for 'Kumpulan Gitar Rancak' which translates to Rhythmic guitar-driven bands, in accordance to its western counterparts, such as Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and Bill Haley and The Comet. Since the 1950s, the many facets of Malay popular music have been the cultural calling card for Malaysian popular music identity as the evolution of the potpourri of styles have taken its shape and form of Malaysian Pop to the forefront.

In the 1960s, as the likes of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and even the psychedelic sounds of guitar heroes like Jimi Hendrix to the jazz maestros, such as Duke Ellington, Bill Evans in its' post-bop guise and the Latin tinge compositions of Antonio Carlos Jobim reached the shores of Malaysia, many of these styles of music were adapted, refined and realigned for into the local stylistic forms and functions of a Malay Popular tune, which were to be consumed for the masse Radio and Television played an integral role in propagating this form of music. Musical cultural popular icons and composers like P. Ramlee, Alfonso Soliano, Ahmad Nawab and Aubrey Suwito are composers of Malay Popular music which drew their inspiration and aspirations from the best of both the Western and Eastern musical ideologies and idioms.

Background

The Origins of Popular Music in Malaysia of the late 19th Century till the Post War period

In the late 19th Century, Malay traditional Folk music, which is classified as music transmitted orally, as well music with unknown composers, music that is played on traditional instruments, music that changes between generations (folk process), music associated with cultural folklore or music performed by specified customs over a long period, was normally found in villages and farming regions where most people apply the oral tradition (Lim, UCSI, 2016). The training process in learning to play musical instruments was by rote method (a memorization technique based on repetition) as there was no systematic music training existing and the knowledge of music history and theory was usually not known. While there were differences between folk and classical music, some genres such as the Malaysian traditional styles such as *makyung*, (a traditional form of dance-drama from northern Malaysia, particularly the state of Kelantan) *wayang kulit Melayu* (Wayang Kulit originally was a traditional form of puppet-shadow play found in the cultures of Java, Bali, and Lombok in Indonesia but was subsequently adapted and integrated unto the storytelling culture of folklore & Malaysian idiosyncrasies), and *zapin* (a popular dance and musical form in traditional Malay performing arts where elegant dance movements are choreographed to the lively melodies, which are

performed using musical instruments such as the *gambus*, short-necked lute) overlapped and existed in both the said categories, whilst maintaining its musical identity yet evolved seamlessly between both folk and classical styles (Rastam, 2015).

One of the earliest elements and origins of Malay Popular Music surfaced during the pre-Colonial period which can be heard in both the urban and rural settings (Tan, 2003). Subsequently, Malay Popular music grew rapidly during the Colonial period because of the exposure of the local multi-ethnic population to foreign kinds of entertainment such as the talkie, European and American operetta and vaudeville, Parsi heater and Chinese opera that toured Malaya during the early 1950s, which was parallel with the baby boomer's generation in America. The travelling 'musicals' which toured Malaya in the 1950s utilised many local elements from both folk and classical traditions which mixed foreign elements from Arab, Persian, Indian, Chinese and Western musical and theatrical sources in the delivery of this form of a (then) new Popular Music. It existed in the form of vocal, dance and theatrical music such as the *ghazal* (a genre sung in poetic quatrains) and *dondang sayang* (repartee singing and a playful form of entertainment where singers, more specifically, two singers, a 'Baba' which is male and a 'Nyonya', female, which originates from the city of Malacca, West Malaysia, exchange extemporaneous Malay *Pantun* is a light-hearted and sometimes humorous style. In *Dondang Sayang*, the singers are normally accompanied by a violin, two Malay *rebana* (drums), and a *tetawak* (gong). These instruments are often supplemented by other available instruments, most notably, accordions, flutes, or an additional violin). *Dondang sayang* which is of a slower tempo in nature also mixes melodic and rhythmic influences from China, India, Arabia, and Portugal with traditional Malaysian rhythmic elements (Lim, UCSI, 2016).

The Cultural Influential Factors on Malay Popular Music



A CD Cover of the recording by the Royal Dutch Orchestra, under the baton of Ger Van Leeuwen on the Rearrangements of Classic Malaysian Popular / Jazz / Folk Compositions (Polygram Records / Universal Records 1963, Reissued 2007).

Culture affects our ways of thinking and perceiving, habits, customs and usages. Music is a form of that very cultural expression shaping our reality as a social construct. It is indispensable to our biographical memory. Any stage of our life can be connected to a type of music, melody or song that helps us to not forget but remain with us from infancy to maturity supplementing sound to our development in societal reality. It shapes our sense of identity through direct experiences via the body, time and sociability, experiences that enable us to find ourselves within our cultural stories.

Malaysian popular music culture is very involved in entertainment, love and mild criticism on social issues interpreted through comedy and fun-poking, or at its most, some reflective local popular and jazz music and the story in the lyrics of the said songs. (Augustin/Lochhead, 2015). Up until the emergence of local popular and jazz music, the political and social boundaries of most Malaysian popular music have been very much of a local context in terms of lyrical meanings even though cultural adaptation of musical trends are mostly multi-culture and past colonization. When navigating the landscape of music, listening to African rhythms, Chinese Opera, Indian Carnatic music or even European art music, one can easily identify these music cultures correctly. The reason is that each type of music is not only distinctive but holds a very well-established musical identity.

According to the Academician of the Culture and Arts in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Professor Mohd Ghouse Nasaruddin (2010), Malaysian music in the past would also cypher through many different foreign influences such as Hindu and Islamic. However, it seems like there were multiple types of native and paganistic ritualistic musical culture being practice being the *orang*

asli of Malaysia way before the presence of India and Muslim traders. For example, the eminence rhythmic nuances for deep meditation and verbal chanting existed way before any western, Islam, or Hindu elements can be traced.

In accordance to the author of Independent Rock Music of Malaysia, Ong Thwee Cheen (2015), another reason for future cultural transnational activism is the advent of the information age since the mid-20th century, the globalized world and together with it the surge of transnational exchange of the people in Malaysia. As a result, more options of national identification become available. Different from the post-colonial time where nationalism is defined and confined to a geographical location, one person can now identify himself/herself to a community that stem across several states. One can keep a plural version of national loyalty as well, one to the state of present residence or where his/her citizenship is, while keeping a cultural loyalty to the homeland of his ancestry.

In short, we will do well to conscientiously look at the evolution of compositional styles and the originality of Malay Popular Music since the Mid-20th century which very well shapes our cultural identity as a nation and vice versa because there has yet to be substantial assimilation of musical styles among the various ethnic groups with the dynamically changing social landscape since the independence of Malaysia in 1957.

The Influential Musical Styles on Malay Popular Music Compositions of the Mid-20th Century in Malaysia

As with the turn of the early 20th century, Malay popular music in its truest form was pioneered by *bangsawan* (a traditional [Malay](#) form of [opera](#) or theatre which is normally performed by a troupe, and accompanied by music and sometimes dances. A typical *bangsawan* theatrical performance combines and integrates music, dance and [drama](#)) musicians in the 1890s. It is made up of a fusion of various elements from the various musical cultures in the country (Rastam, 2015).

The local version of guitar bands ‘kugiran’ which is an acronym for ‘kumpulan gitar rancak’ (upbeat guitar group) became popular nationwide and during this era marked the first form and style of the term coined ‘Malay Popular music’ which was an amalgamation of Western harmonic chord structures, styles (beguine, cha-cha, mambo among other forms of modern contemporary western styles) and instrumentations doubled with local lyrical sensibilities and melodic phrasings (with a great emphasis on the harmonic minor scale) which appealed to the masses in late 1950s-early 1960s Malaysia. This type of music was then labelled as ‘Pop Yeh-Yeh’ or ‘popular music with a vibrant bounce’. P. Ramlee’s compositions entitled ‘Bunyi Gitar’ (The sound of the guitar), is the perfect embodiment of this style (Chan / Boyle, 2014).

According to James Lochhead and Paul Augustin (Just For The Love Of It, 2015), as Malay popular music was evolving from the bands who were performing in nightclubs, weddings shows, and also travelling bands throughout the country in the 1960s, in other form of entertainment and media, Malay popular music also played an integral role in the many film scores which were delightfully cored with original music in an orchestral setting and this also provided the background music for many ‘Live’ shows which were broadcasts throughout the country in either Radio or, as the movies were played, in the cinema. This merging of cultures continued in the 1970s, although not on a conscious or focused level, with western jazz, rock and pop and Indian film music or *irama* (melody) Hindustan being the major influences on

local pop musicians. A local composer by the name of Ahmad Nawab is the significant composer/songwriter from this period writing local pop songs influenced by Western, Hindustani and *asli* (original slow tempo Malay folk music) styles.



P. Ramlee, born Tan Sri Teuku Zakaria Bin Teuku Nyak Puteh (22 March 1929 – 29 May 1973), was a Malaysian Actor, Filmmaker, Musician, and Composer. During His Prime, His Fame Has as Both An Actor, Musician and Composer of Malay Popular Music Reached Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia as well as in Hong Kong and Japan (Arkib Negara, Kuala Lumpur, 2019)

Compositions of the Mid-20th and Early 21st Century in Focus

As observed by Dr Chan Cheong Jan of Universiti Putra Malaysia (Chan / Boyle, 2014), throughout the years since the forming of the nation, the popular and jazz composers of Malaysia of the 1950s and 1960s compositional works, such as those of Ahmad Merican, Jimmy Boyle and Alfonso Soliano have been proven by their peers, by music critics home and abroad, and by academicians to have always been at the forefront of the Malayan / Malaysian music scene during the infancy stage of the birthing of this nation. Many of their works have been extensively played, produced, broadcasted, performed in many guises and all shapes and forms by various symphony orchestras, big bands, marching bands, jazz trios, pop and rock ensembles, Broadway influenced musicals, choirs, vocal duets and even buskers by countless of sources and thousands of musicians both home and abroad by the media (Television, radio and the internet), higher learning institutions, schools and commercial venues since the 1950s. This paper will focus on the selected compositional techniques of four chosen composers of Malay popular music from both eras. Jimmy Boyle and Alfonso Soliano from the Mid-20th Century and Mokhzani Ismail and Aubrey Suwito from the early 21st Century. By this, each of the aforementioned composers will have a composition analysed from a singular compositional viewpoint to highlight the various compositional aspects such as the harmonic applications (Air Mata Berderai-Afonso Soliano), melodic phrasings and articulations (Gema Rembulan-Jimmy Boyle), the form and modal chords (Selingkuh Kasih-Mokhzani Ismail), and the form and structural dissertation (Gemilang-Aubrey Suwito), found in their compositional techniques.

Methodology

The theories applied in the analysis of the chosen compositions in focus are based on Jack Perricone's, *The Art of Songwriting* (6th edition), (Berklee Press, 2015) on the analysis of the form, Steve Rochinski's extensive research on the Harmonic techniques (Berklee Press, 1995) on the harmony and John Mehegan's *Jazz Improvisation, Volume 1* (New York Press, 1993) is utilised on the dissertation of the improvisational techniques. Thus, in this paper, the selected compositions in focus are dissected from the four aforementioned compositional standpoints which are the:

1. *Harmonic Analysis of Alfonso Soliano's 'Air Mata Berderai'- 1964*
2. *The Melodic Phrasings and Articulations of Jimmy Boyle's 'Gema Rembulan' – 1956*
3. *The Form and Modal Chords of Mokhzani Ismail's 'Selingkuh Kasih' – 2006*
4. *The Form and Structural Dissertation of Aubrey Suwito's 'Gemilang' – 2005*

The Compositions in Focus

Harmonic Analysis of Alfonso Soliano's 'Air Mata Berderai'- 1964

Written in 1961, whilst in Bangkok, Thailand, Alfonso wrote this tune as an ode to joy to his many jazz influences which had inspired him in this style of music. Written in the form of the most popular form of jazz at that time, which was bebop swing, 'Air Mata Berderai' features chords, and forms that are akin to an 'American Jazz Standard

The tune in its form structure is an evenly structured balanced tune, written in the form of A-A-B-A with a coda that acts as a refrain to the ending of the song.

Written in Malay popular music guise, Alfonso added this to his armoury of work in the hope of elevating Malaysian music on the same plateau as the great American Jazz standards of the 1940s. With 'swinging' melodies, short memorable repetitive motifs and with hooks laden in both the 'A' section with equally a refrain in the 'B' section with a higher melodic leap which is scale-like, it mirrors a scale-like movement of the melody, thus enabling the vocalists to sing with ease and to adlib at his / her discretion.

The one person that inspired him the most would be George Shearing, a British born jazz pianist and composer. A lot of similarities can be found in both Shearing and Alfonso's pieces when they are compared, such as the instrumentation used and the way they voiced their melodies in octaves and unison with piano, guitar and vibraphone, while the bass accentuated other important bass notes that were not played by the other instruments, and with the drum in charge of keeping time.

AIR MATA BERDERAI
Composed by Alfonso Soliano

I Ma7
Moderate Swing

INTRO Fmaj7 #I Dim II min7 V7 III min7 (bIII7) (bVI Maj7) sub V7 / I
F#° Gm7 C7 Am7 Ab7 Dbmaj7 F#7

A I Maj 7 (IV7)
5 Fmaj7 Bb7

9 II min7 V7 / I III-7 (b5) V7 (b9)
Gm7 C7 Am7(b5) D7(b9)

13 II min 7 IV min7 (bVII7) (bIII Augmented 7) VI min7
Gm7 Bbm7 Eb7 Ab+ Dm7

(V7 / V) 17 G7 II min7 (bIII 7)
Gm7 Ab+

21 I Maj 7 (#IV-7(b5) V7/III IIImin7 Vimin7 IImin7 V7 / I To Coda I (#IDim)II min V7 / I
Fmaj7 Bm7(b5) E7(b9) Am7 Dm7 Gm7 C7(b9) F F#° Gm7 C7(b9)

27 IIImin7 Vimin7 IImin7 (V7 / I) IIImin7 Vimin7
Am7 Dm7 Gm7 C7(b9) Am7 Dm7

30 IImin7 (V7 / I) (bVIMaj7) (bII7) IMaj7
Gm7 C7(b9) Dbmaj7 Gb7 Fmaj7

Figure 1: Harmonic Analysis of ‘Air Mata Berderai’ (Transcribed by Khair Latiff, as performed by Zain Azman, RTM Combo led by Alfonso Soliano, 1964).

Here are the various harmonic richness, diatonic, non-resolved and modal which Alfonso Soliano used in ‘Air Mata Berderai’:

- Diatonic Harmony= I Maj7, II min7, III min7, V7/I and VI min7
- Auxiliary Diminished Chords = # I Diminished 7
- Non-resolving Modal Interchanges = bVII7, #IV-7(b5), bII7, bVI Maj7, bIII Maj 7
- II min7 -V7 chord structure = II min7 – V7/III 7(b5) – V7/II
- Modal Interchanges= bII7, b III Maj7,
- Secondary Dominants = V7/II, V7/III,
- Deceptive Chordal resolution= The ending of the Song (bVI Maj7, bII7, I Maj7)

The Melodic Phrasings and Articulations of Jimmy Boyle's 'Gema Rembulan' – 1956

The epitome of what was concisely termed Malay popular music in the mid-20th century in Malaysia. It is in the richness of its chords and the leaps in the melodic contour and form that makes 'Gema Rembulan' a firm favourite for many enthusiastic jazz musicians in and around the country since the 1950s, 'Gema Rembulan', showcases Jimmy Boyle, who grew up listening to the American Jazz standards of Errol Garner, Bill Evans, George Shearing and Nat King Cole emulating his American peers and musical idols in composing a tune with a melody, which is deeply rooted in the jazz idioms and employing many chords, which are both tonal and modal.

The uniqueness of 'Gema Rembulan' is further enhanced in the application of the 3/4 rhythmic meter, which was not a common compositional trait among many Malaysian composers in the 1960s. With a melody, which confines itself to one octave.

Dol Baharim Jimmy Boyle

Waltz (Andante) with feeling

Chords: Eb9, Ebdim, FM7, Fm7, Bb7, Eb, Cm, D9b9, Abaj7, Bbm7, Eb7, Ab, Ab.

Lyrics: Bu lan men yi na ri di ang ka sa Me nen bus ke ge la pan chu a cha Ta ter ban ding se ga la nya di su loh kan nya ta Se

Figure 2: 'Call' Melodic Phrases, Bars 1-4, and the 'Answer / Response' Melodic Phrase, Bars 5-8 (Original Piano Arrangement by Jimmy Boyle, 1956).

As indicated in the above figure, the melodic contour of 'Gema Rembulan' is peppered with melodic, intervallic leaps which act as 'acrobatic' phrasings throughout. The 'call' of bars 1 to 4 is echoed perfectly in 'bars 5 to 8, thus opening the song with a strong melodic contour of perfect 4th intervals and descending and ascending scale-like melodic texture, all within eight (8) bars.

In the opening 12 bars, even though Jimmy Boyle condensed the range of the melody to be within an octave, there are many intervallic leaps throughout. According to the original vocalist of this composition in 1960, which was a prominent vocalist from Indonesia named Sandra Reemer (Rhino Records, 1960) the structure of the melody is still conjunct, thus making it easy for the vocalist to sing. She also added that the richness of the chords which adds much colour and flavour to the song also challenges any vocalist or the main soloist to pay extra precaution in the presumption of accidentals which are prevalent throughout.

Dol Baharim

Waltz (Andante) with feeling

Chords: Eb9, Ebdim, FM7, Fm7, Bb7, Eb, Cm, D7(b9), Ebmaj7, Bbm7, Eb7, Ab, Ab.

Lyrics: Bu lan men yi na ri di ang ka sa Me nem bus ke ge la pan chu a cha Ta' ter ban ding se gn la nya di su loh kan nya ta Se

Figure 3: Counterpoints, in Bar 3 to bar 4. (Original Piano Arrangement by Jimmy Boyle, 1956).

As highlighted in the above figure, in the original piano arrangement of ‘Gema Rembulan’, the counter melody in bars 3 and 4 augments and responds concurrently to the set-up of the ‘call’ section of the composition. The rest of the original arrangements, in terms of its augmentation and counter melody, are made up of its minim and crochets comping of fifths in the left hand throughout. There, in response to the beauty of the melody, ought to have been more counter-melody on the left hand.

Compositions of the Early 21st Century in Focus

The Form and Modal Chords of Mokhzani Ismail’s ‘Selingkuh Kasih’ – 2006

As with many Malay Popular Compositions written in the early 21st Century, ‘Selingkuh Kasih’ is written in a popular song form manner in the form of an Intro – Verse – Pre-Chorus – Chorus structure with musical interludes, evolving pop to rock bass lines and a rock guitar inspired improvisational interlude which elevates the song from an arrangement point of view.

An instrumental solo or instrumental break is common on Malaysian pop ballads which are heavily orchestrated during this era (Mid-20th century to early 21st century). In terms of harmony and scales, another practice which is not uncommon in the many popular pop ballad styles which have been accustomed to in the various airplay on Malaysian radio is the inclusion of the harmonic minor scales over minor 7th chords to create the ethnicity of ‘Malayness’ over the composition.

As contemporary in the mid-2000s as a perfect popular orchestra composition with jazz idioms and phrasings as ‘Gema Rembulan’ was in the 1960s, ‘Selingkuh Kasih’ with its many melodic movements and intervallic melodic leaps, whilst applying the chords derived from the jazz vocabulary and yet still sounding Malaysian and contemporary echoes many nuances of the said Jimmy Boyle tune of the 1960s.

The usage of modal interchanges, secondary dominants, both resolving and non-resolving are also found throughout the composition.

Selingkuh Kasih

Pop
♩ = 75

ADIBAH NOOR
Composed by MOKHZANI ISMAIL

Intro

I Maj7 Gmaj7 IV Maj7 Cmaj7 (V7 / I) D7

III -7 Bm7 V7 / III E7 II -7 Am7 (b VI Maj 7) Fmaj7 (b III Maj 7) Bbmaj7 II -7 Am7 V7 / I D7

III -7 Bm7 VI -7 Em7 (b VI Maj 7) Ebmaj7 V7 sus4 Dsus V D

A

I Maj7 Gmaj7 V D VI -7 Em7 V D IV Maj7 I Maj 7 Cmaj7 Gmaj7/B

Ka-sih-mu diper-sim-pa-ngan tau-p a-rah an-ta-ra ke-te - lu - san dan ke-ka -

II -7 Am7 (b VI Maj 7) Fmaj7 IV Maj 7 Cmaj7 V7 D7

bu - ran Mu-m - m - m

Figure 4: ‘Selingkuh Kasih’, Harmonic Analysis, Modal Interchange Chords in the Intro and Section A, as Circled. (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

19 **B** VI-7 Em7 III-7 Bm7 IV Maj 7 Cmaj7
 Di ma - na - kah ke - ju - ju - ra - n Du - lu se - ring di - den -

22 I Maj 7 Gmaj7/D **V7/Vi** B7/D# VI-7 Em7 I Maj 7 Gmaj7/D **(V7/IV)** A7/C#
 dang - kan Se - wak - tu ka - sih mu - la ber - pu - tik Ki -

25 IV Maj 7 Cmaj7 **V7/IV** A7/C# IV D V7/II D7/C I Maj 7 Gmaj7/B V7/II D7
 ni ke - lom - pak cin - ta la - yu se - pi Ja -

Figure 5: ‘Selingkuh Kasih’, Harmonic Analysis, Secondary Dominant Chords in Section B, as Circled. (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

48 VI-7 Em7 (V7/Vi) B7/D# (V7/II) D7 (V7/IV) A7/C# IV Maj 7 Cmaj7 III-7 Bm7 (IV-7) Cm7 (V-7) Dm7
 (Guitar solo) (#IV-7) D#m7 IV maj 7 Bbmaj7 I Maj 7 Gmaj7/D V7 D7 V7 D7

52 V7 D7 (II-7 b5) Am7(b5)/G I Maj 7 Gmaj7/D (V7/IV) A7/C# II-7 Am7/C III-7 Bm7 IV Maj 7 Cmaj7 (V7/II) D7 **(VI Maj 7) Emaj7**
 se - ling - kuh ka - sih - - - - - Ja -

Figure 6: ‘Selingkuh Kasih’, Harmonic Analysis, E Section and Outro Section. The Circled Chord Indicates the Deceptive Resolution Chord Which Replaces the Tonic, as the Song, Instead Resolves to a VI Maj 7th. (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

Mokhzani Ismail's main harmonic usage on 'Selingkuh Kasih'

- Diatonic chords/ Inverted chords
- Modal interchanges
- Secondary Dominants (Resolving and non-resolving)
- Inverted chords
- Deceptive Resolution

The Form and Structural Dissertation of Aubrey Suwito's 'Gemilang' – 2005

A beautiful, soaring structure of a melody, 'Gemilang' is a popular composition with acrobatic vocal structure in the style of Mariah Carey (current popular / rhythm and blues/soul singer from the United States who first emerged in the late 1980s). Whitney Houston (a popular rhythm and blues/soul / popular / gospel singer of the 1980s/ 90s 00s) and many Gospel tinged vocalists, which was the inspiration behind the writing of this composition.

Malay popular music composition in essence with rhythm and blues and gospel sensibilities, 'Gemilang' can be branded as a nationalistic call to the pride of one's homeland, and sounding Malaysian (not just in lyrics) but in form and uniqueness of its melodic and harmonic embellishment and also in its adlibbing of the vocal delivery styles., 'Gemilang' was a commercial breakthrough for Aubrey and also its vocalist Jacklyn Victor and also an artistic achievement for the composer in the sense of Malaysian identity with the usage of Western tonal harmony, rhythms (R& B) and the jazz chordal harmonics in its arrangements.

The Form Of 'Gemilang'

Written as a popular ballad with the infusion of jazz chords, 'Gemilang's song form is a perfect example of a textbook popular ballad style of the early 21st century. Starting the composition with a soft delicate piano/keyboard intro (bars 1 -4) 'Gemilang' sets the platform for the upcoming mood and tone of a composition that would explode with sonic joy and exuberance.

Gemilang

Pop
♩ = 66

JACLYN VICTOR
Composed by AUBREY SUWITO

Intro

(Piano only)

Figure 7: Piano Intro of 'Gemilang' (Bars 1-4) (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

The composition moves into Section A / Verse in the next 8 bars, which is balanced and progresses to Section B / Pre-Chorus which is 5 bars, and according to, Berklee's College of Music Songwriting Workbook (Perricone, 2012), to write it in an imbalanced odd tempo barring would be the idealistic choice in terms of propelling the composition with more urgency to the next segment.

Verse

5 Gmaj7 Dmaj7 Gmaj7 Dmaj7
Ber ju-ta bin-tang me - nya-nyi Ku di an-ta - ra yang sa-tu

9 Gmaj7 F#m7 Bm7 Esus E A
Mung-kinca ha-ya dan im-pi-an ku di si - ni ge-mi - lang La-lu

Pre-Chorus

13 Cmaj7 Gmaj7 /A /B Dmaj7
ku re-dah o-nak du - ri dan la - u-tan a - pi Ke-mun-

15 Cmaj7 Gmaj7/B Gmaj7 A A7
cak - nya i - nginku ta - w - an A - ku je-la - ja-hi Ki - ni

Figure 8: Section A (Verse), bars 3-12 and Section B (Pre-Chorus), bars 13-17 of 'Gemilang' (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

Section C or Chorus 1 is imbalanced with an odd barring of 9 bars. This is an uncommon tool of practice, as Choruses in a popular composition are, the focal points and the 'commercial selling element' or the 'Hook', which is a term used in the Songwriting textbook (Perricone, 2012) to determine, the part which is most obvious to catch on to the memory of the listener upon as few hearings as possible. This is subjective, as no individual has the same amount of 'memory recollection' upon hearing a tune/song no matter how simplified or complex one composition might be.

Chorus

18 Dmaj7 A7/C# F#7 Bm7 3
Ge-mi-lang i-tu , se-ma-kin pas-ti-ku geng-gam Ge - mi-langsus - a - ra Ke-ya-ki

21 Am7 Dmaj7 Gmaj7 A7 F#m7 B7 3
nan ki-an da-lam Ge-men-tar ha-rus ja-ngan Ji-wa-ku ha-rus ber - te-na - gaMung-kin-kah i-

Figure 9: Section C / Chorus, bars 18-26 of 'Gemilang' (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

At this juncture, the composition progresses to another Pre-Chorus or Section D, the numbers of bars (5 bars) are identical to that of Section B / Pre-Chorus 1, yet the melodic phrasings are different as are the melodic patterns.

Pre-Chorus 2

ku re-dah o-nak du - ri dan la - u-tan a - pi Ke-mun-
cak-nya i - nginku ta-wan A - ku je-la - ja-hi O-o - o Ki - ni

Figure 10: Section D / Pre-Chorus 2, bars 27 – 31 of ‘Gemilang’ (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

The composition progresses to the climax at Section E / Outro / Chorus 2. In terms of melodic phrasings, Section E / Outro / Chorus 2 is similar to that of Section C / Chorus. It is in the harmony which will be dissected at 4.7.3 Harmonic Analysis of ‘Gemilang’ which differs.

Outro / Chorus 2

ge-mi-lang i-tu se-ma-kin pas-ti ku geng-ga - m Ge - mi-langsus - a - ra ke-ya-ki-
nan ki-an da - la - m Ge-men-tar ha-rus ja-ngan ji-wa-ku ha-rus ber - te-na-ga Mung-kin-kah i -
ni Men-ja - di re - a - li - ti Ki - ni
ber - te-na-ga Mung-kin-kah i - ni men-ja - di re - a - li - ti

Fine

Figure 11: Section E / Outro / Chorus 2, bars 32 -41 (house 1), bars 32 -36, 42-46 (house 2) of ‘Gemilang’ (Transcribed by James PS Boyle and Chin Sook Jing).

In conclusion, the Form of ‘Gemilang’ is:

Intro – Section A (Verse) – Section B (Pre-Chorus 1) – Section C (Chorus) – Section D (Pre-Chorus 2) – Section E / Outro, (Chorus 2).

Review, Summary and Conclusion

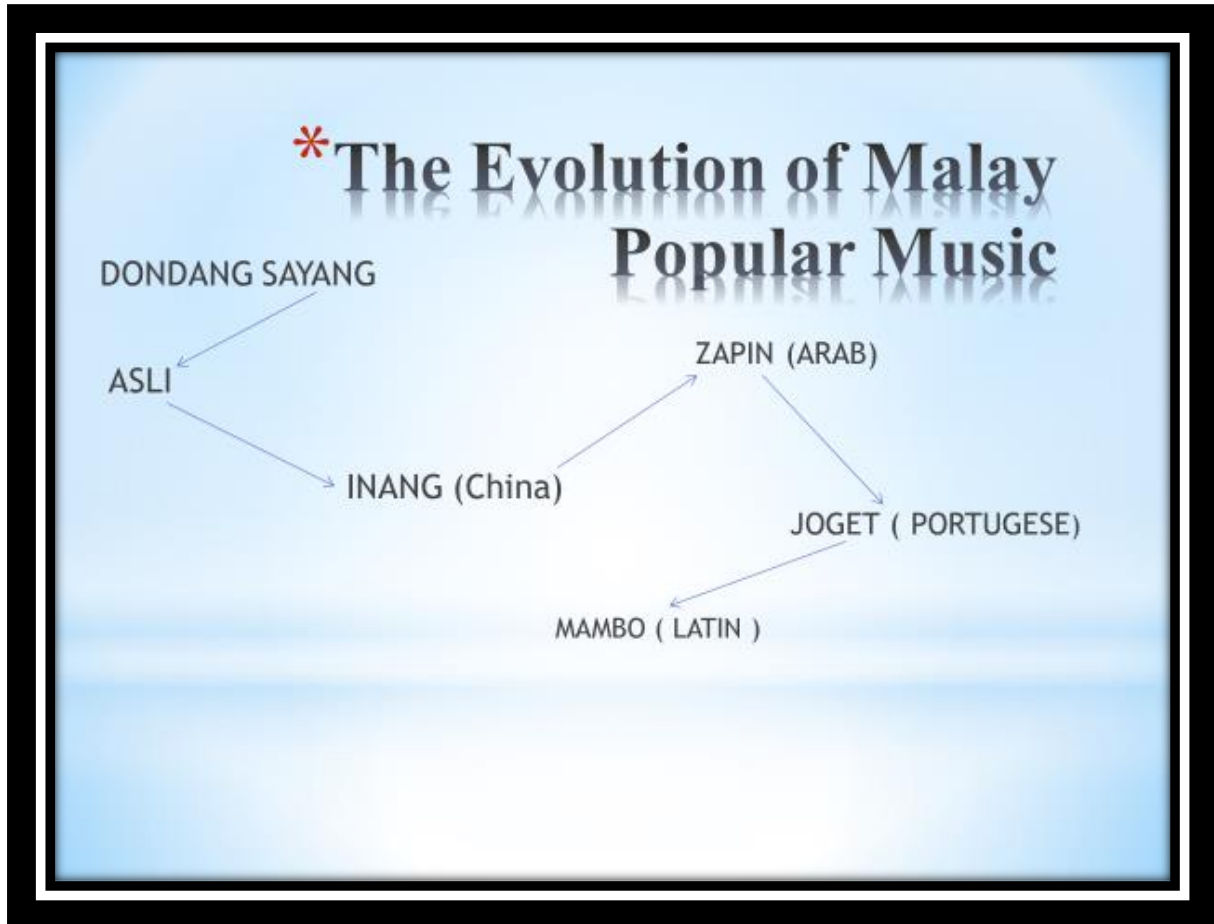


Figure 12: The Graph Indicates the Various Forms of Styles Which Have Influenced the Compositional Techniques of Malay Popular Music in Malaysia Since The Early 20th Century.

As indicated in figure 12, the chart indicates the evolution of Dondang Sayang in its original form of ‘asli’ which means original and its evolution to the styles of ‘Inang’ rhythms which originated from China. Its subsequent stylistic change to Arabic dance beat of ‘Zapin’ is furthered by the implementation of the Portuguese dance styles of the ‘joget’. By the mid-20th century, Dondang Sayang was eventually rearranged in the western stylistic Latin rhythms of the ‘Mambo’

In the mid-20th century in Malaysia, at the time of the nation’s independence, Malay popular music emerged as a new form of music that catered to the multiracial audience in Malaysia and abroad. Furthermore, during the infancy stages of Malay popular music was also closely associated with jazz-pop ballads, and was also a cultural ‘calling card’ of the nation through the then Nationalistic compositions of the land and through the authentic elements of the

localized style of music which was infused in the compositions of the popular and jazz musicians during the mid-20th century in Malaysia. Audiences of diverse cultures were ministered by new songs in the Malay language that promoted an inclusive view of 'Malayness' and to bridge a discourse of a unified Malaysia through songs and compositions which depicted the beauty of the land, the harmony of the people as well as to strengthen the then, people's resolve in implanting and implementing a strong sense of national unity and an identity of a young Malaysian nation through the songs and compositions, written exclusively for this very purpose by the cream of the local musicians such as Ahmad Merican, Jimmy Boyle and Alfonso Soliano.

In the early 21st century, Malay popular music propagates a different meaning and its function was for an entirely different spectrum. In the 1980s, 90s and till the present day, for example, even though Aubrey Suwito's 'Gemilang' had its stylistic musical influences firmly rooted in the Western music styles of Pop, Gospel and Rhythm and Blues, his composition 'Gemilang' is categorized by the media, the public and also regarded by the musicians in Malaysia as 'Malay music', which ironically translated as Malay popular music in the national language of Malaysia. In the early 21st Century, the paradigm has shifted in lieu of what constitutes a Malay popular composition and the conclusion is that fluidity of what constitutes a Malay Popular music composition which originated its roots in the theatrics of *Bangsawan* music, infused with the ethnic Malay rhythms of *Zapin*, *Joget* (a traditional Malay dance with Portuguese roots. Joget music is fairly quick in tempo and emphasizes duple- and triple-beat division, both in alternation and simultaneously), *Inang* (a mid-tempo traditional Malay folk music dance form which originated from China through the Sultanate of Malacca during the 15th Century), and even *Keroncong*. has evolved and progressed with a consistent progressive musical sensibility, and the strength to absorb the myriad of styles that has propagated the Malaysian Music culture and identity of Malay Popular Music since the Mid-20th Century.

Hence, Malay Popular music from the 21st century, with the scales of the melody and with harmonic content based on the western idioms and theories absorbs the various forms of jazz, funk, soul, Modern Latin and even Hip hop and Rock unto its limitless boundaries, strengthen by the intricate melodic phrasings and intonations which is identifiable Malay Popular Music but infused with both idioms and styles of the past (*inang*, *Asli*, etc) and the future (funk, jazz, hip hop , rock and even electronic music).

For example, even though Aubrey Suwito's 'Gemilang' had its stylistic musical influences firmly rooted in the Western music styles of Pop, Gospel and Rhythm and Blues, the said composition is categorized by the media, the public and also regarded by the musicians in Malaysia as 'Malay music', which in return is translated as Malay popular music as opposed it being categorised as Malaysian popular music. The term, Malaysian popular music today is an umbrella for various forms of music, such as Chinese pop, English Independent Rock music and even Religious music in its various shapes and forms.

In conclusion, composing a Malay popular Music tune in the early 21st century is a cosmopolitan effort in the perfect marriage and infusion of styles with the latest technology available. In addition to it, the identity of the melody which is distinctively Malaysian, with its roots in the traditional Malay styles are the perfect capsule to elevate Malay Popular music to a higher plateau, and even further the demographic reach with its identity and the combination

of the myriad of styles which has influenced it in the decades before, being anchored as the thrust of propelling a Malay Popular Composition for future generations.

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