

GAMELAN SARAWAK A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Earlier research and report by Jani (2006) and Jalal (2008), have acknowledge the existence of ‘*Gamelan Sarawak*’. It is unique in such a way that they have been known to exist as early as in the 1920s (Jalal, 2008). Known as the most active performing gamelan group in Sarawak particularly in Kuching-Serian area, recent research has shown the ensemble have gone through significant changes ranging from their repertoire as well as their musical instruments. This paper discussed their evolution, some of the changes and challenges in sustaining the future.

INTRODUCTION

Gamelan Sarawak is one of the forms of offerings that are also used initially for *da'wah* purposes to the local community. This approach is the same approach used by early Javanese preachers. This approach is a special way of preaching to the people who used to enjoy entertainment during the old days. This approach is an approach used by preachers in the Java archipelago by Wali Songo, particularly *Sunan Bonang*. *Sunan Bonang* is the name given to *Raden Makdum Ibrahim*, one of Songo's Wali who is interested in art and uses *bonang* musical instrument as a medium for *da'wah*.

Gamelan instruments of Kampung Jawa, Sarawak would probably something not publicly known to most of the community elsewhere Kuching. Jani (2006), gives a brief introduction on what can be regarded as the most unfamiliar performing arts in Sarawak. Jalal (2008), gives a brief introduction to Gamelan in Sarawak in his book entitle *Joget Pahang - Gamelan Melayu, The Classical Ensemble of the Pahang Royal Court*. He described the ensemble as “less conventional” and sound “more contemporary” (Jalal,2008). The ‘*Gamelan Sarawak*’ according to Jani (2006) and Jalal (2008) was established by Wak Dirim Amat who inherited the skills and knowledge from his father, Amat Noh, who himself an active performer and practitioner as explained by Jani (2006) cited from Mardzuki and Rambli (2003).

However, according to Jani (2006), it was in the early 90s where the group known as *Gamelan Gemar Bakti* gained its popularity in Sarawak particularly in Kuching and Serian area. According to Jani (2006), before the *Gamelan Gemar Bakti* was established, there are several other group established earlier, among those groups are the *Orkes Kesenian Jawa Asli*, established in 1953 by Dolah Wongsu with mainly performing the Gamelan music, *Orkes Keroncong Irama Gambang*, led by Abdul Rahman Ojer, and *Orkes Melayu Mekar Dahlia*, based at Kampung Jawa Batu 12, led by Osman Bitul (Jani, 2006). Table 1, illustrate timeline of the Gamelan groups in Sarawak as outlined by Jani (2006).

The *Gamelan Gemar Bakti*, mentioned by Wak Dirim, according to Jani (2006), was established in 1990. During its early establishment, the group repertoire was mainly on *keroncong* and malay traditional music but later includes popular music. The group gained its popularity in Kuching-Serian area, and among the factor that make it popular is due to its