

THE MUSICAL STYLES OF THE BERAWAN PEOPLE WITHIN THE UPPER REACHES OF SUNGAI BUNUT, SARAWAK, EAST MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This paper accompanies the production of a 20-minute observational documentary titled “Voices of Loagan Bunut”. This document presents a series of cultural and personal portraits of Iban, Berawan and Penan musicians, singers and dancers living in the periphery of Loagan Bunut National Park (LBNP), Sarawak. It also demonstrates the social functions of traditional music in the context of this contemporary era of rapid modernisation. The documentary portrays two objectives. Firstly, the music traditions of the communities, which include the role of music in the culture and society, musical instruments and various forms of songs and dances. Secondly, it aims to highlight the current predicament faced by the musicians and their music. The digital recording media deployed ensures that historical data on the Iban, Berawan and Penan music and culture are more broadly disseminated and hence, appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2004, a group of researchers from the Music and Cinematography program in the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, University Malaysia Sarawak conducted a research on the musical styles, dance and traditional musical instruments of the ethnic groups living in and near the LBNP.

The short but intensive period of research yielded approximately 10 hours of data digitally captured in the form of interviews, notes, recorded music and dance. An additional outcome from this survey is a 20-minute observational documentary. The specific longhouses at which research was carried out were:

- 1) Rumah (Rh.) Kajan Sigeh—Berawan settlement;
- 2) Rh. Meran known also as Rh Loagan Bunut—Berawan settlement;
- 3) Rh. Junggang—Iban settlement; and
- 4) Rh. Paking—Penan settlement.