

Creative Musical Practices in the Performance of Pantun Sunda

by Andrew N. Weintraub

*bul kukus mendung ka manggung
nyambuung ka awang-awang
ka manggung neda papayun
ka pohaci neda suci
ka dewata neda maaf
kuring dek diajar kidung
nya kidung carita pantun
ngahudang carita anu baheula*

may the incense billow upward
spreading throughout the heavens
from the heavens I seek protection
from the goddesses I ask a blessing
from the gods I ask forgiveness
I wish to study *kidung* [a poem or song]
yes, the *kidung* of the pantun story
to awaken an ancient story

*Text excerpt of the song "Rajah," performed as part of the story
Mundinglaya di Kusumah, on January 5, 1989, in
Ujungberung, Bandung, West Java.*

In rural areas inhabited by Sundanese throughout West Java, ancient tales called pantun¹ Sunda are sung to honor the ancestors and request blessings at ritual feasts. The purpose of a ritual feast, or *hajat*, is to obtain well-being for a rite of passage (e.g. circumcision, wedding) or object (e.g. house). The *upacara netepkeun pare*, rice harvest ceremony, and the *ruatan*, a purification ceremony, are other occasions where pantun are traditionally performed.

The performance of a pantun is commissioned by a host family and presented at the host's home. The performance of one story (called a *pantun*, *carita pantun*, or *lakon*), traditionally begins after *isa*, the Islamic sunset prayer, and ends before the morning prayer, *subuh* (around 4 am), the following morning. Audience members sit on mats inside or gather just outside the host's home. They listen and watch with varying degrees of attentiveness to the story recited by a solo performer.

The performer of these ancient tales is known as a

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juru pantun [literally "pantun expert" or "pantun specialist"]. A *juru pantun* possesses the ability to contact spirits and requests their blessing and protection for those present at the *hajat*. In West Java, "relations between man and the supernatural are usually mediated by recognized experts. . . most villagers do not feel competent to freely approach and deal with supernatural powers" (Wessing 1978:66). The *juru pantun* acts as a medium by making offerings (*sasajen*) such as food, incense and song ("Rajah," "Kidung," and others) to supernatural forces in the hope of receiving a blessing for the host. The performer "serves as an example" to others (Soeryawan 1977:77) and offers advice within the presentation. *Juru pantun* are often blind.²

The majority of pantun recount the initiation of a hero who leaves his kingdom to seek "experiences, beautiful princesses to become his wives, purity, other kingdoms to subject to his power, [and] the realization of a dream" (Rosidi 1984:143). After enduring hardships and finally attaining these goals, he returns to his kingdom to rule. The majority of stories are based on the exploits of heroic figures from the Pajajaran kingdom (1333-1579), which Sundanese consider the apotheosis of Sundanese autonomy and power.

The tales embody the language, history and beliefs of the Sundanese.³ The earliest written reference to pantun comes from a 1518 moral code, *Sanghyang Siksa Kandang Karesian*, which predates the major political, cultural and religious influences in Sunda of Mataram, Central Java and Islam. The changes which have occurred over centuries as a result of Hindu, Javanese and Muslim influences in West Java are reflected in contemporary performance practice. For example, in the invocatory song "Rajah," which opens every performance, the *juru pantun* requests a blessing from animist spirits, Indian-derived gods and goddesses and Allah.

The term *pantun* refers to a story which is rendered through narration, dialogue, and song. The performer accompanies himself with a *kacapi*, a zither. Historical sources (reviewed in Falk 1980:37-57) also mention the use of *tarawangsa* [bowed lute] but the most common instrument in the highland mountainous plateau of West Java (called the Priangan) is the *kacapi*. A more recent phenomenon is the introduction of supporting musicians, ranging from one musician (either *tukang rebab* [bowed lute player], *juru alok* [caller/singer], or *sinden* [female vocalist])

to a complete gamelan.

Juru pantun use sung vocal phrases for narration, dialogue and description of scenes; songs to support dramatic events and characters; instrumental pieces for dramatic effects; and frequent formulaic florid instrumental passages which keep the performer's voice in tune and advance the drama. The use of such varying resources serves to create the association between sound and action, whether it be to describe a character or an action (in a travelling song or battle song, for example). The diversity of musical resources also provides contrast during the lengthy performance event.

The literature on pantun Sunda consists of primarily Dutch and Indonesian sources. Previous studies have focused on the textual content of the stories (for example, Pleyte 1906; Eringa 1949; Rosidi 1973a); my research investigates its form, style and presentation. In particular, I address concerns raised by Indonesian folklorists about the need for musical studies on pantun (Rosidi 1973b:110 and Danandjaja 1986:152).

During 1988-89, I conducted interviews with juru pantun in the regions of Bandung, Banjaran, Sukabumi, Sumedang, and Kuningan in West Java. The juru pantun I interviewed participate in a discourse about continuity and change in musical performance. My examination of musical form, style and presentation of pantun Sunda in contemporary practice reveals a dynamic system which involves processes including borrowing, embedding and juxtaposition of musical and textual materials from other genres. In this article, I will discuss contemporary musical practice with special reference to one performer, Ki Enjum.

Biography of Ki Enjum, juru pantun

Ki Enjum is an older performer noted for his musical skill and creativity, and a major contributor to this study. He was born in 1918 in Ujungberung, a district 12 kilometers east of Bandung. He was told that he became totally blind by his ninth day of life. As a child, he accompanied his uncle and *guru* [teacher] Raden Padmadinata to performances and learned stories by listening and imitating.

His initiation ceremony (*tawajuhan*) as a juru pantun took place in 1933. Soon thereafter, he began performing in cities outside of the Bandung area. During the next two decades, Ki Enjum performed extensively because of his mastery of a large repertoire of stories. Audiences could request an indigenous story, usually based on events and characters from the Pajajaran era (e.g. *Mundinglaya di Kusumah*); an Islamic story set outside Sunda (e.g. *Umar Maya*); or an historical account (*babad*) usually concerning the conversion to Islam of areas in or bordering on Sunda (e.g. *Walangsungsang*). Specific stories could also be requested for the knowledge contained within them and performed with specific events; for example, the story



Ki Enjum, left, and Mang Ili.

Sulanjana is concerned with the planting, maintenance and harvest of rice, and is often performed in conjunction with the rice harvest ceremony in West Java.

In interviews, Ki Enjum recounted that his monthly performance schedule was full during the 1940s through the 1970s, often consisting of 20 to 25 performances per month and sometimes as many as 15 nights in a row. During the 1940s and '50s, the majority of performances occurred in the host's home and at present this is still the norm. During the 1960s, however, with the advent of pantun supported by gamelan, hosts began constructing outdoor stages to accommodate larger musical ensembles.

During the 1960s, Ki Enjum was often joined in performance by Mang Ili, a longtime friend and fellow musician. Mang Ili sang popular songs, interspersing them into the performance, accompanied by Ki Enjum on kacapi.

Ki Enjum was asked to participate in a pantun documentation project directed by the Sundanese author Ajip Rosidi in 1971. Three stories were recorded and transcribed and one transcription was published by the *Proyek Penelitian Pantun & Folklor Sunda* [Research Project of Sundanese Pantun and Folklore]. In 1974, the *Lembaga Kesenian Bandung* [Art League of Bandung], published a transcription of *Mundinglaya di Kusumah*. In 1980, Ki Enjum was one of several juru pantun selected to perform in a festival of pantun at Rumintang Siang, a public auditorium in Bandung.

As of 1989, Ki Enjum continues to perform, although much less frequently (an average of 1 to 2 times per month). He is asked to perform solo, with Mang Ili, or accompanied by a full gamelan. In his solo performances, Ki Enjum is

solely responsible for telling the story and singing all the songs; in the other two situations, he relates the story and sings only a portion of the songs. He is a creative juru pantun whose style incorporates new elements but retains a high degree of continuity with the past.

Music in Pantun Sunda

Musical innovation is and seems to have long been an important feature of pantun Sunda.⁴ A multiplicity of styles exists contemporaneously in West Java, creating a rather complex and fluid situation. Contemporary musical performance practice exhibits a diversity of traditional pantun styles—including the style performed by Ki Enjum.

Sundanese musicians welcome the free flow of musical and textual materials across genres. Borrowing, embedding and juxtaposing materials—such as lyrics from other songs, melodies, and accompaniment patterns—are important processes in the composition and performance of Sundanese music. Musical elements are constantly adjusted across genres to fit their new environment. The use of *kawih sisindiran* [texts], melodies, kacapi accompaniment patterns and tuning systems are illustrative of the dynamic quality of music in pantun Sunda and Sundanese music in general.

Kawih sisindiran

Kawih sisindiran are short poems sung to melodies in fixed meter. The most common type of sisindiran in pantun Sunda are *paparikan*, four line poems consisting of eight syllables each.⁵ The first two lines, called *cangkang* [cover], set up a rhyme that is answered in the second two lines, called *eusi* [content]. The *cangkang* may or may not relate literally in meaning to the *eusi*, which usually communicates a maxim of some sort. The ability of the performer to create sound associations between the two couplets is often central to the audience's attention.

The usual tendency is to address *kawih sisindiran* directly to the audience rather than relate the poem to the plot of the story (Rosidi 1973a:VI). In contrast to *purwakanti* ("classical Sundanese verse occurring in pantun" [van Zanten 1989:65]), which possess distinct formal characteristics and describe scenes or characters within the story, the performer uses *kawih sisindiran* to offer advice or topical commentary *outside* the plot of the story.

Ki Enjum, however, weaves *kawih sisindiran* *within* the plot of the mythical story. For example, the following *kawih sisindiran*, "Kulu-kulu," performed September 15, 1988, within the story of *Senjaya Guru*, accompanies the marriage scene between the hero Senjaya Guru and the princess Nyi Mas Penglaras Rajunan Tapa. The song is a common feature of a *hajat* held in conjunction with a marriage where a story such as *Senjaya Guru* would be appropriate. The *kawih sisindiran* serves a dual function: it links the marriage in the dramatic time frame to the marriage in the real time frame.

ari ayang-ayang gung
gung goongna rame
ongkoh hayang tapi bingung
teu daek sieun kajampe

ari menak Ki Mas Tanu
nu jadi wadana
najan anakna geus tangtu
ingkeun heula ka ramana

naha mana kitu
ari tukang olo-olo
lamun ama teh geus tangtu
poma ulah ngabobodo

mana loba anu giruk
ruket jeung kumpeni
paingan bapa teu rujuk
teu aya tata pasini

let's play [the game] *ayang-ayang gung*
 the gong sounds loudly
 (he) wants to marry (her) but (is) still confused
 afraid of a magic spell

the royal Ki Mas Tanu
 became the district chief
 although ready to become his wife
 better ask your father first

why do you act like that?
 like a spoiled child
 if your father agrees
 don't ever tell lies

many take sides
 with the V.O.C. [Dutch East India Company]
 her father won't agree
 because of his bad manners

In addition to illustrating the creative use of *kawih sisindiran* as a dramatic framework, the above example shows embedding of lyrics from other sources. The first two lines from each verse derive from the popular *lagu* [song] called *Ari Ayang-ayang Gung*, in which phrases are connected by linked assonance, a common textual device in Sundanese song. In the example below, the syllable at the end of each line is repeated at [or near] the beginning of the next line.

ayang-ayang gung
gung goongna rame
menak Ki Mas Tanu
nu jadi wadana
naha maneh kitu
tukang olo-olo
loba anu giruk
ruket jeung kumpeni

Voice
 RH
 Kacapi
 LH

$\text{♩} = 204$

3 3 so3 3 so3 4 3 3 3 3 so3 3 4 3 4 4 4 4 3 so3 3 so3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4

me - nak nga-lem - per-eng ko - neng lem-peang leber wa - wa - nen 6

free

5 4 5 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 4 4 4

lu - lu - rung ti - lu nga-ban - dung

2 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 s5 1 1 2 1 s5 1 2 1 2 3

di - so - ra - ng ti - lu - an - a - na

Figure 1. Transcription of the lagu "Renggong Gancang," performed as part of the story Ciung Wanara, February 15, 1989, in Ujungberung, Bandung, West Java.

Kacapi Accompaniment Patterns

Sisindiran text/melody clusters are shared among a variety of musical genres in Sundanese music, and so it is not surprising that musical hybrids frequently develop. Kacapi accompaniment patterns also reflect the hybrid nature of contemporary pantun Sunda performance.

Kacapi accompaniment patterns may be metered or unmetered. Purwakanti are traditionally accompanied by unmetered patterns, whereas sisindiran are traditionally treated with metered patterns. In Ki Enjum's performances, however, many of the melodies associated with kawih sisindiran (*Kulu-kulu*, *Banjaran* and *Renggong Gancang*) have been set with purwakanti that are specific to pantun Sunda. That is to say, Ki Enjum sets lyrics normally associated with unmetered accompaniment to metered accompaniment. This interchangeability is perhaps possible because of the tendency of both purwakanti and sisindiran lyrical formulae to adhere to octosyllabic phrases. The purwakanti text and translation for Figure 1 is shown below. (For another example of purwakanti, see the text excerpt at the beginning of this article.)

*menak ngalempereng koneng
lempereng leber wawanen
lulurung tilu ngabandung
disorang tiluanana*

the prince shines in gold
glowing and full of bravery
the three passages are connected
all three are trodden

The adjustment between unmetered and metered accompaniment requires skill and subtlety, and Ki Enjum often departs from the rigidity of the metered accompaniment. The transcription in Figure 1 shows the fixed meter accompaniment as temporarily unmetered (note the unmetered section outlined in brackets as "free").

Tuning System

In performances of pantun Sunda in the Priangan region, the kacapi is tuned to either pelog, a five tone scale made up of large and small intervals, or salendro, a five tone scale made up of basically equidistant intervals. The vocal part may be sung in pelog, salendro or sorog, another pentatonic system.

The approximate Western equivalent note names of pelog, salendro, and sorog, together with corresponding pitch numbers from high to low, are as shown below.

pelog	f	e	c	b ^b	a	F
salendro	f	e ^b	c	b ^b	g	F
sorog	f	e	d	b ^b	a	F
Sundanese cipher	1	2	3	4	5	1

While pitches on the kacapi are fixed, the voice moves freely between pelog and salendro by adding "vocal tones" (Kunst 1949:354), "modulating" between tuning systems (Tamura 1977:69), embedding melodic passages and juxtaposing entire song melodies (in a tuning other than the fixed pitch accompaniment) against the fixed pitch accompaniment.⁶ For example, "Renggong Gancang" (Figure 1) is primarily in pelog; the cipher notation shows the introduction of sorog 3 (so3) and salendro 5 (s5).

The availability of salendro and pelog in the vocal part allows the performer to combine tuning systems within one song for heightened effect. In *Coyor* (Figure 2), the embedding of short salendro melodic passages contrasts with the primarily pelog melody and creates tension that is later resolved when the player shifts back to pelog.

The use of musical and textual materials from different genres contributes to the hybridization of pantun Sunda performance. In contemporary performance practice, poetic forms are skillfully woven into the mythical story. Song texts from other genres are embedded within the context of pantun to form new songs. Generic pantun texts are set within non-generic musical forms. Melodic passages belonging to different tuning systems alternate freely within the same song. Ki Enjum and other juru pantun have used these dynamic musical processes in their continuous efforts to awaken the ancient stories of pantun Sunda. ▀

Notes

1. In West Java, "pantun" refers to a Sundanese performance genre.
2. Historical sources corroborate this phenomenon (Pleyte 1906:25).
3. See Weintraub 1991 for English synopses of five tales.
4. Pleyte (1906:26) mentioned that the younger generation of tukang pantun began using kacapi with a greater number of strings in order to play a wider repertoire of songs. Eringa (1949:3) reports that innovations include the addition of tarawangsa and *suling* [bamboo flute].
5. Paparikan are similar in form to Malay pantun.
6. The latter two are described in Weintraub 1990.

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$\text{♩} = 204$ pelog _____ salendro _____
 Voice rap! ku pa-ul kodot rap! ku pa-ul ngo-ra ku bo-eh beu-nang neu-leum lan-cing-an
 Kacapi (brush—) (brush—)
 _____ pelog _____
 o-pat di-rang-kap-keun ku-rang ti-lu cir nga-li-wat hi-ji hi-ji-na
 _____ pelog _____
 sa-di-a beu-nang - na dang-dan

Figure 2. Transcription of the lagu "Coyor" performed as part of the story Senjaya Guru, Sept.15, 1988, in Ujungberung, Bandung, West Java.

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