

Reflection of Islamic musical culture in an Indonesian Malay secular song as evidence of local identity

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Abstract

This study explores the cultural production of Indonesian folk song performances, particularly those celebrated within the Malay community. It focuses on understanding the influence of Islamic musical culture on the musical structure and style of these songs. In regions where Islam is the dominant religion, music often reflects and inherits Islamic cultural values, even when the lyrical content is secular. This research employs qualitative musicology methods to analyze and interpret the interplay between musical phenomena and cultural identity, highlighting how Islamic influences manifest in local music traditions. The research centres on the melody of *Laksmna Raja di Laut*, as performed by renowned Indonesian singer Iyeth Bustami. The study utilizes music transcription as a primary data collection method, supported by detailed observations of the song's music video. Analysis of the transcription reveals that despite the song's secular lyrics, it incorporates distinct elements of Islamic musical culture. These elements include using Arabic maqam scales, a prologue characterized by free improvisation that closely resembles the melodic style of Qur'anic recitation, and harmonic progressions similar to Flamenco musical traditions. The findings of this study underscore the inextricable link between music and cultural identity in Islamic societies. Music in these contexts often serves as a vehicle for expressing cultural heritage and locality, blending traditional Islamic elements with regional influences. This research contributes to Islamic music studies by providing musicological evidence of Islamic cultural influences within the Indonesian archipelago. Moreover, it highlights how these influences extend beyond the examined song to impact other Malay folk songs, enriching the broader discourse on the role of Islamic culture in shaping regional music traditions. By bridging musicology and cultural studies, this research offers valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between music, religion, and Southeast Asian identity.

Keywords

cultural identity, Islamic music, Malay folk song, maqam, musicological analysis

Introduction

This study is concerned with singing a popular Malay song as a cultural reflection of Islamic society in Riau, Indonesia. This study takes the case of the performance of a popular song titled *Laksmna Raja di Laut*, which Iyeth Bustamiy, an Indonesian female singer, sang. The strong association between Malay culture and Islam is well-founded, as Riau—predominantly inhabited by ethnic Malays—has long been recognized

as a major centre of Islamic influence (Purnama, 2021). Up to 2024, the Muslim population was 78,29%, while the remaining 21,71% were Christian, Buddhist, Hinduism, and others (BNPT, 2024). The region's entire cultural products were Islamic in their characteristic. However, the popular Malay song, *Laksmna Raja di Laut*, which musically has an Arabic presentation, seems characteristically 'Islamic'. Its content, however, is not a religious one. It presents

an epic message that could be considered a secular song, a unique blend that challenges our preconceptions and surprises us with its non-religious content. However, *Laksmana Raja di Laut* as one of the Malay songs should have an Islamic cultural influence.

The *Laksmana Raja di Laut* is a popular Indonesian Riau Malay ethnicity song. The song is also proudly regarded as an original piece of Malayan folk heritage in neighbouring Malaysia (see Ayderova, 2022). Geographically, Riau is in an area of Malay cultural societies. Riau is one of the Indonesian provinces with an area of 817.564,46 square km, located in the middle part of Sumatera and neighbouring Singapore, which the Strait of Malacca separates (BPS, 2024). The Strait of Malacca is a narrow, 550-mile-long stretch of water between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatera (Nofandi et al., 2009). It is one of the most important shipping lanes in the world, and its strategic location has made it a significant cultural and economic crossroads (Hariyanto & Ridwan, 2024; INCAS, 2015). Socio-culturally and politically, the location of Riau is among the countries that were once declared a cultural area of the Malayan archipelago called the Nusantara (Alexentseva, 2001; Evers, 2016; Kroef, 1951). Despite the controversy that arose over the claim, it shows that the song has Malay artistic characteristics with Islamic musical culture influence.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Popular Malay songs often carry associations with Islamic messages. This perception stems from the common assumption that ethnic Malays, particularly in Indonesia, are predominantly Muslim. However, what is less recognized is that Islamic influence permeates not only religious-oriented music but also secular Malay songs. This cultural blending is especially evident in Southeast Asia, where Indonesia and Malaysia, as part of the Nusantara region, share deep-rooted historical and cultural ties. The term Nusantara refers to the Malay Archipelago, encompassing countries and territories such

as Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Singapore. Understanding the influence of Islam on secular Malay music requires recognizing the broader cultural landscape of the Nusantara region, where Islamic and local traditions have long intersected.

Islamic culture enriches not only religious-oriented music but also infuses secular Malay songs with its distinctive character. This perspective challenges the assumption that Islamic musical influence is limited to explicitly religious contexts and reveals a broader cultural integration in secular artistic expressions. Some may argue that popular Malay songs should inherently carry Islamic messages, based on the widely held belief that Malays in Indonesia are predominantly Muslim (see Laffan, 2006). However, this view often overlooks the nuanced presence of Islamic elements in secular compositions. Such influence reflects the historical and cultural interactions across the Nusantara region—comprising Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore—which forms a shared Malay cultural heritage (Alexentseva, 2001; Evers, 2016; Kroef, 1951). Recognizing Islamic cultural traces in secular Malay music invites a more inclusive understanding of how religion and tradition intertwine in Southeast Asian musical practices. It also encourages further exploration of cultural identity and historical exchange within the broader Nusantara context.

Islamic popular music studies in Indonesia have made valuable contributions through their focus on social dimensions, and further technical musicological research would enrich our understanding of its artistic elements. While examining music from a social perspective is essential, overlooking its musical and artistic structure limits a fuller appreciation of its cultural and aesthetic value. Historically, the emergence of musical genres outside religious contexts has sparked debates over their permissibility among certain Islamic groups (Yusof & Bidin, 2008).

To steer clear of prolonged controversies regarding what constitutes licit or illicit musical practices, many studies on Islamic popular music in Indonesia have centred on its role in da'wah—the Islamic mission (Akmaliah, 2014; Fahrudin & Barakbah, 2018; Mardiani, 2021; Rohmad, 2020; Wati, 2017). These studies primarily apply a socio-religious lens, emphasizing music's function rather than its form. A fuller understanding of Islamic music in Indonesia requires combining social analysis with musicological studies of its style, modes, and structure.

This study discusses the cultural impact of Islamic music on a Malay popular song performance. Until now, research on the influence of Islam on the presentation of traditional pop songs has been carried out, among others, related to folk music traditions in Türkiye and Kosovo. Studies in Türkiye have a theoretical focus, such as cases the analysis of aspects of art in folk music and the method of transmission of unmetred folk. In addition, other studies that examine the presentation of traditional songs, which among its focuses is on in the song lyrics. These studies show that the study of the influence of Islamic music on the presentation of traditional pop songs, especially in the Malay region, is still rarely conducted.

This study aims to examine the cultural influence of Islamic music on the performance of a Malay popular song. Although there are very few studies examining the influence of Islamic elements in traditional popular music—and despite the presence of many countries, such as Türkiye, that have cultural influence within their folk traditions—such studies remain limited in the Malay context. In countries with a high level of cultural influence, the transmission of traditional folk music elements to other countries may occur. However, there is a significant research gap regarding how Islamic musical elements shape secular song performances in the Malay world, and this study aims to address this gap.

Islamic Musical Culture and the Malay Secular Tradition

Research on the Islamic world's production and consumption of Islamist cultural products remains incomplete and fragmented. Despite the growing visibility of Islamic culture in contemporary life, scholarly exploration has yet to fully capture the diversity and complexity of how Islamic values influence both the creation and reception of cultural products. Previous studies have mostly focused on fashion, linguistics, poetry, and music, leaving other areas underexplored. For instance, Juliana et al. (2024) conducted a survey on product consumption in Islamic societies and discovered that while altruistic values, egoistic values, and consumer attitudes influence purchase intentions, Islamic religiosity itself does not have a significant effect. On the production side, studies have leaned toward literary analysis. Yılmaz & Çiçek (2024), after analyzing Islamist poetry in contemporary Turkish literature, concluded that such poetry plays a key role in shaping Türkiye's cultural and literary discourse. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of Islamist cultural dynamics, future studies should broaden their scope to include other forms of cultural production and consumption, exploring how religious identity interacts with artistic expression across different media.

Studies on the reinterpretation of traditional music in applied and sustainable contexts often highlight how local music evolves through the intersection of global cultural influences. Understanding how traditional music absorbs and reinterprets external influences is essential for recognizing its adaptive, living nature and its cultural sustainability. Bayramova (2023) presents traditional Azerbaijani music as a national heritage shaped by historical experiences. Abeysekara & Meddegoda (2023) explore the musical representation of Sri Lanka's infidel minority, whose expressive forms trace back to enslaved Africans brought by Portuguese colonial powers. In the Indonesian context,

Setiawan (2023) investigates musical transformations in Javanese gamelan influenced by colonialism and nationalism, while Sunarto (2023) analyzes the impact of Hinduism and Buddhism on Indonesian music. A closely related example is Hatzikiriakos's study (2023), which explores the interaction between Mediterranean and local Tunisian music. While their focus lies in North Africa, this research investigates how Middle Eastern musical traditions intersect with Malay music in Indonesia. These comparative perspectives enrich our understanding of how traditional music reflects global-local interactions. This study contributes by situating Malay music within broader Middle Eastern cultural exchanges, offering insight into the dynamic formation of musical identity in Southeast Asia.

Research related to education often highlights the role of cultural identity preservation, especially in language and music. Education serves as a critical space for transmitting cultural heritage, and studies have shown that sustaining traditional language and music is essential to maintaining cultural identity across generations. Sanabria et al. (2024) investigated students at the Juliaca Public Pedagogical Higher Education School in Peru's Puno Region and found a prevailing preference for Spanish over regional languages like Quechua and Aymara. While Spanish is the official language, the study emphasized the need to maintain regional languages within family contexts to ensure their survival. In music education, Chambidme et al. (2024) discuss examined how traditional musical elements in Peru are altered in postmodern compositions. They observed a decline in melodic consistency due to the layering of various instrumental elaborations. Meanwhile, Lam (2024) explored light music in Vietnam and its role in reinforcing local identity through specific musical traits. These studies collectively underscore the importance of preserving linguistic and musical identity in education. They are conceptually aligned with this research's concern for sustaining cultural

characteristics through the reinterpretation of traditional elements, particularly in the musical practices of Malay communities.

The literature suggests that maqam, as a core concept in Islamic musical culture, has long influenced ritual music traditions and evolved alongside societal changes (Shaiakhmetova, 2022). During the Islamic Renaissance, musical knowledge expanded across regions through scientific and cultural advancements (Akhundova, 2023), including to Southeast Asia. Despite this diffusion, there remains limited research on how maqam-based aesthetics appear in secular Malay music. This gap highlights the need to explore the musical expressions of Islamic culture in non-religious genres. In this context, the present study focuses on the song *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, aiming to analyze its melodic and formal features for potential traces of Islamic musical influence.

In summary, the reviewed literature demonstrates that Islamic musical culture—particularly through the concept of maqam—has played a central role in shaping musical identity across various regions, including Southeast Asia. However, while studies have extensively explored Islamic influences in ritual or religious music, limited attention has been given to how these influences manifest in secular traditional genres, particularly within Malay musical practices in Indonesia. Building upon prior research that affirms the significance of maqam and 'handasat al sawt' in Islamic musical expression, this study addresses a critical gap by examining how such elements are reflected in the melodic structure and musical form of a secular Malay song. Therefore, this research is positioned to uncover how Islamic cultural values are sonically preserved and expressed within non-religious musical traditions, using the song *Laksmana Raja di Laut* as a representative case.

Problem Statement

Although *Laksmana Raja di Laut* is a heroic Malay song, its musical content appears to lack overt religious characteristics. This raises a cultural paradox—Malay musical traditions, particularly in the Riau region, are strongly associated with Islamic values, given the close ties between Malay identity and Muslim communities. The song's heroic narrative does not explicitly convey religious themes, yet as a traditional Malay composition, it is theoretically expected to reflect elements of Islamic culture. This discrepancy calls for a deeper examination of the song's musical components—such as its use of *maqam* (scale mode), melodic contour, musical form, and performance structure—to uncover possible reflections of Islamic influence beyond lyrical content. This study, therefore, aims to investigate how Islamic cultural elements are embedded in the musical features of *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, offering a broader understanding of how Islamic identity can be subtly expressed in secular Malay music traditions.

Research Methodology: A Qualitative Musicological Approach

To understand and interpret the musical phenomena of its subject, this research uses a musicological qualitative method (Bradley, 1981; Brester & Stake, 2017; Gerring, 2017; Haslbeck et al., 2021). The qualitative method examines information and other non-numerical data from subjects that meet certain qualities and from an event or social phenomenon. This method, including politics, is commonly used in social sciences (see Gerring, 2017). Because musicological data have similar characteristics to the social sciences, namely tending to be non-numerical data, music research also uses qualitative methods (Bradley, 1981). For example, the application of qualitative methodologies in music studies includes the study of music education (Brester & Stake, 2017) and the study of music therapy (Haslbeck et al., 2021). Thus, the musicological qualitative method is appropriate for this research which analyses the singing style of a song as

a musical sample.

The material object of this study is the melody of *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, sung by a popular Indonesian singer, Iyeth Bustami. The performance became more recognised after the singer uploaded the traditional Malay song to YouTube. Although the performance features a mixture of traditional Malay music elements and modern arrangements, it displays the rich cultural heritage of the Malay Archipelago. Bustami has been known for her powerful vocals and ability to convey the emotional depth of the song. Many people appreciate the singer's performance due to its authenticity and respect for traditional songs. This song emphasizes the courage and leadership of the titular figures, often associated with regional folklore. The song was chosen as this study's material object not only due to its cultural significance, which reflects the maritime culture of the Malays and the history and legends related to the sea, but also the Arabian style of its musical performance. The style raises curiosity about the influence of Islamic music culture in this song.

Data was collected using a music transcription method based on a music video observation. Music transcription can be considered as one of the data collection methods in qualitative research on music. Nettle (1983) emphasized the importance of music transcription in documenting and analysing music from different cultures. Merriam (1964) explains how music can be studied through various anthropological methods, including music transcription as a tool for in-depth analysis. In addition, music transcription techniques have been teamed up as part of various theories and methods in ethnomusicology that are useful for analyzing and interpreting music (Herzog, 1964; Zamotin, 2020). In discussing various qualitative methods in music education, music transcription has also been used as an analytical instrument (Ayderova, 2022; Matsunobu & Bresler, 2014). Thus, music transcription in this study does not need to doubt its importance.

This study uses musicological qualitative analysis techniques through inductive reasoning. The disclosure of musicological elements of the song applies a theoretical analysis to confirm musical phenomena with maqam theories and analytical analysis to confirm musical forms. In musical form analysis theoretical approach is also applied to related the subject to such concepts a form and composition device (Watanabe, 1967:5). A theoretical approach in music research refers to an approach that uses musicological theories and theoretical concepts to analyze, interpret, and understand various aspects of music (Cook, 1987; Evans & Kerman, 1986; Krummel & Watanabe, 1968; Matsunobu & Bresler, 2014; Taruskin & Gibbs, 2013). This technique would be useful in proving the spread of Islamic musical culture through specific observations namely the musicological phenomenon on a sample target.

The influence of Islamic music culture on the performance of Malay songs can be revealed through several musical elements that show their uniqueness. The disclosure of these elements in this study uses a modification of the theoretical study procedure. In this regard, it begins with a selection of data to determine the material objects to be studied and conduct a theoretical review of Islamic music culture, namely the characteristics of the *'handasat al sawti.'* Henceforth, the implementation of this research takes place through several stages prevalent in musicological research. The first is transcribing the melody from a selected YouTube video view into standard notation. The transcription results then became the basis for revealing the application of key signatures, type of scale mode, musical form, and performance structure. The disclosure of the indications of the influence of Islamic culture is by comparing the elements indicated with the characteristics of the *'handasat al sawti'* (al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi, 1986; Al-Faruqi, 1986).

Tracing Islamic Musical Elements in a Malay Song

Socio-culturally and politically, the location of Riau is among the countries with Islamic influences, especially the existence of maqam in songs, which is evident in the data attached to the melody and presentation of the studied song. To get a visualization of the vertical dimension, in this case, the pitch fluctuation of each note, including the harmony behind it, and the horizontal dimension, which is the variation in the length of the short-sounding value of each note, has been transcribed. The material object studied is a melody extracted from a music video of an album entitled: *"Zapin-Dut: Laksmana Raja di Laut,"* originally produced in the form of a commercial audio cassette by the MGM recording company in Riau, Northern Sumatera, with production serial number C-0137. We can now find a copy of the recording online through the YouTube channel (Web 1). Based on melodic transcription, the result of this study includes the use of melodic mode and the pattern of both musical form and performance structure.

Transcription and Analysis of Song Lyrics

The musical transcription in this study focuses on the main melody of the song *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, as it serves as the foundation for understanding the song's formal structure. This structure is not discernible through auxiliary musical elements, such as the instrumental introduction, interludes, or the improvised vocal prologue; rather, it is embedded in the principal melodic lines that carry the lyrical verses (see Stein, 1979:58-63, on auxiliary member types). A video performance by Iyeth Bustami illustrates this distinction clearly, presenting a combination of auxiliary and core sections. The auxiliary components include a brief improvised vocal prologue and several instrumental interludes, while the main section is marked by lyrical singing that adheres to a traditional Malay poetic form consisting of quatrains. The structure organizes the lyrics into two

types of quatrains: the first type consists of four distinct quatrains performed in two sets (two quatrains per session), and each session concludes with the second type—a repeated quatrain functioning as a refrain. From a musicological perspective, analysts would identify the core melodic material in these two quatrain types, each of which

spans one normative period. Therefore, this study prioritizes the transcription of these repeated melodic periods, as they represent the song’s most structurally and musically significant components, distinguishing them clearly from the auxiliary vocal and instrumental sections.

Prologue	
Zapin <i>Aku dendangkan lagu Melayu Pelipur hati, pelipur lara</i>	Zapin I’am singing a Melayu song Solace, solace
First Stanza	
(A)	
<i>Cahaya hari kilau gemilang Di Tanjung Tapir indah menawan Kubernyanyi lagu Zapin riang Moga hadirin (aduhai sayang) jadi terkesan</i>	The light of the glorious glitter In Tanjung Tapir beautiful charming I am singing a happy Zapin song May the audience, oh dear, be impressed
(A) repetition	
<i>Kembanglah manis atas kepala Lipatlah tangan sanggul dipadu Kita berdendang bersuka ria Lagulah Zapin, aduhai sayang, rentak Melayu</i>	Sweeten over the head Fold the hands of the buns together. We are singing to have fun Sings the Zapin, oh dear, the Malay beat.
(B) 2 x (repeated)	
<i>Laksmana Raja di laut Bersemayam di bukit batu Ahai hati siapa, ahai tak terpaut Mendengar lagu Zapin Melayu</i>	Admiral, King of the Sea Sitting on a rock hill. Oh, whose heart, oh unlinked Listening to a Malay Zapin song

Figure 1. The structure of the lyric reading in the first round preceded by a prologue

Figure 1 shows that the vocal part appearing first marks the beginning of the main verse section. This initial vocal phrase introduces the nature of the performance, distinguishing it from the structured main part. The opening vocal line declares that the upcoming piece is a Malay song featuring Zapin verses intended to entertain the audience. Unlike the main part, this prologue melody is an improvised introductory statement, as the rhythmic structure of traditional Malay poetry does not bind it. It also lacks the expected number of syllables and lines

required to be considered a formal verse within the main song form. In contrast, the lyrics in the main section follow a clear AA BB stanzaic pattern, reflecting the structure of Malay poetic tradition. This consistent form becomes evident through transcribing the main melody, which supports and expresses both quatrain types. The transcription reveals the formal characteristics of the song’s lyrical content and focuses on the structured main melody, distinguishing it from the improvised prologue.

Second Stanza	
(A1)	
<i>Membawa tepak hantaran blanja</i>	Bringing a shopping pass
<i>Bertata perak indah berseri</i>	Beautiful silver berries
<i>Kami bertanda menghidup budaya</i>	We're marked to live a culture.
<i>Tidak Melayu, aduhai sayang, hilang di bumi</i>	No Malay, oh dear, lost on earth
(A1) repetition	
<i>Petinglah gambus lantang berbunyi</i>	Plucks the Lute loudly and sounds
<i>Disambut dengan tingkah meruas</i>	Celebrated with stretching act
<i>Saya bernyanyi sampai di sini</i>	I'am singing just up to this stage
<i>Mudah-mudahan hadirin semua menjadi puas</i>	Hopefully, all the audience will all be satisfied.
(B) 2 x (repeated)	
<i>Laksmana Raja di laut</i>	Admiral, King of the Sea
<i>Bersemayam di bukit batu</i>	Sitting on a rock hill.
<i>Ahai hati siapa, ahai tak terpaut</i>	Oh, whose heart, oh unlinked
<i>Mendengar lagu Zapin Melayu</i>	Listening to a Malay Zapin song

Figure 2. The reading of the verse in the second round shows the structural clarity of this song

The application of Malay poetry in *Laksmana Raja di Laut* reveals distinctive structural features, particularly in the recurrence and variation of quatrain types across the first and second stanzas. This uniqueness lies in the song's repetition of melodic patterns while maintaining the integrity of its poetic form. The first type of quatrain comprises four distinct four-line verses, each line conforming to the traditional Malay poetic rule of ten syllables. These are delivered in two sessions, forming the core lyrical material. In contrast, the second type consists of a single quatrain but is repeated twice per session, serving as a refrain. Although its lyrics remain unchanged across stanzas, it holds significant weight due to its thematic alignment with the song's title. This quatrain also introduces metrical contrast, with each line containing eight syllables, thereby distinguishing it from the ten-syllable structure of the first type. Musically, the first type of quatrain begins and ends on the dominant, whereas the second type opens on the tonic (G minor) and concludes on the dominant, offering

a nuanced harmonic variation. Despite appearing after the first type, the second quatrain assumes a prominent role in shaping the song's identity. Through this interplay of repeated melodic material and contrasting poetic meters, the song demonstrates a sophisticated adaptation of Malay poetic forms that enhances both its musical structure and expressive depth.

The first and second types of quatrains in the song exhibit a flexible poetic structure that accommodates the insertion of additional words within certain lines. These insertions—typically expressive interjections or greetings—affect the syllabic count but do not disrupt the core meaning of the verse. For instance, the fourth line of the first quatrain (type one) reaches 15 syllables due to the addition of the greeting “*a-du-hai sayang*” (“oh dear”), which contributes five extra syllables. Without this embellishment, the line still conveys a complete message within the standard ten-syllable format. A similar case appears in the second quatrain of the first type during the second stanza

round, where the phrase “*se-mua ha-di-rin*” (“all the audience”) expands the line while preserving its semantic clarity. Although the second type of quatrain typically maintains an eight-syllable-per-line structure, its third line occasionally extends beyond this, as seen in the 12-syllable line “*Ah-ai ha-ti sia-pa, a-hai tak ter-pa-ut*” (“Oh, whose heart, oh unlinked”). The repeated interjection “*ahai*” adds four syllables, yet the underlying meaning remains intact when reduced to the essential eight syllables (*ha-ti sia-pa tak ter-pa-ut*) (“whose heart unlinked”). These instances illustrate that such insertions are stylistically acceptable and commonly employed in Malay poetic songs. They provide rhythmic and expressive flexibility while maintaining both poetic integrity and narrative clarity—suggesting a broader poetic convention across Malay musical traditions.

Melodic Transcription

The song’s form can be effectively identified through the melodic structures found in the first type of quatrain (A) and the second type (B). These two quatrain types serve as the primary building blocks of the composition, offering sufficient musical material to represent the entire structure of the song. This identification is crucial, as the remaining verses in the performance reuse the same melodic patterns established in quatrains A and B, reinforcing their representative role in defining the overall form. A transcription of these two sections enables a precise analysis of the song’s formal construction. By focusing on these melodic units, the analysis can uncover key musical features, such as the scale system employed, the internal organization of musical phrases, and the approximate harmonic progressions that support the lyrical lines. These elements collectively illuminate how the composition achieves cohesion and variation within a traditional framework. Therefore, from a musicological perspective, the form of *Laksmāna Raja di Laut* becomes clearly traceable and interpretable through the detailed examination of these two quatrain

types. This focused approach not only highlights the song’s structural logic but also supports a deeper understanding of its compositional style within the context of Malay poetic song traditions.

LAKSMANA RAJA DI LAUT

Sung by Iyeth Bustami
 Transcribed by Sevi Q A'yun
 Verified by Andre Indrawan

PART ONE
 (Antecedent)

Ca-ha-ya ma-nis ki-lai ge - mi - -lau. Ditan-jung Ta-pir, in-dah me-i

V i

(Consequent)

na-wan. Ku ber-nya-nyi Za-pin ri - ang Smo-ga ha - di - rin a - du - hai

V iv i V

PART TWO

sa - yang ja-di ter ke - san. (Kem-bang-lah -yu. Laks-ma - na Ra-ja di La -

VI iv i V V i

ut. Ber - se - ma-yan di bu - kit ba - tu. A - hai has-ti sia- pa, A - hai tak ter-pa-

V iv V iv V iv

ut men - de - ngar la - gu Za-pin Me-la - yu? Laks - ma - -yu.

V iv VI iv i V V

Figure 3. Transcription of the main melody of the song *Laksmana Raja di Laut*.

The song *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, as performed by Iyeth Bustami, follows a distinctive two-part song form. This form becomes evident when focusing solely on the vocal part while excluding the instrumental sections and the improvised vocal prologue. The transcription of the main vocal lines reveals that the formal structure is built on complete lyrical stanzas, supporting a clear two-part division. While a complete listening experience might lead one to interpret the form as ABC—mainly when the improvised vocal prologue is perceived as contributing structurally to

the main section. Although the conjecture of the form is not wrong, the analysis in this study uses a theoretical approach, namely looking at the research subject by referring to theories about compositional forms that are prevalent in Western music (Krummel & Watanabe, 1968; Watanabe, 1967). According to this approach, the analysis focuses on compositional form rather than performance style. The recurring dominant chord movements in both sections may create ambiguity for analysts, as traditional Western forms typically move from dominant

to tonic (Stein, 1979). However, despite this unusual harmonic progression, the song exhibits a clear two-part structure. By applying a theoretical lens rooted in Western compositional form, this study identifies *Laksmana Raja di Laut* as a two-part song with unique chord progressions that challenge—but do not contradict—conventional form expectations.

This study confirms that the song *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, despite being a folksong, adheres to a normative period structure with slight deviations that reflect its expressive performance style. While folksongs typically follow predictable phrase structures, the musical transcription reveals that this song introduces subtle variations that expand the expected phrase length. Based on the theoretical model of a melodic period—comprising two four-beat phrases (antecedent and consequent), each made up of two two-beat sub-phrases (Stein, 1979:37-38)—the melody of this song was expected to span 16 measures or two full periods. However, transcription results show an apparent lengthening in the first period by one measure, extending it to 17 measures due to repetition and performance embellishments. Specifically, the lyrical phrase “...aduhai sayang...” (“...oh dear...”) occupies the second half of the seventh measure (as an anacrusis) and the first half of the eighth measure, effectively stretching the phrase into a nine-measure period. When this expressive insertion is omitted, the passage returns to eight measures, confirming its structural flexibility. Moreover, both parts of the entire form contain upbeat repetitions at their first ending measures (prima volta) that enhance the sense of closure and continuation. Thus, even with its ornamental nuances, the song’s form adheres to a standard binary structure with regular phrase groupings. These deviations reflect a creative adaptation of the normative period format, enriching the expressive delivery without disrupting its fundamental compositional logic.

The main song performance has a unique form that allows it to be considered a two-part or a three-part pattern. The difference between the two parts of the existing form is significant. Theoretically, a two-part song form should have the second half of the second part identical to one of the first part’s motives. However, in this transcription, the second part is entirely different from the first and does not even normatively close with a tonic but is concluded by a dominant harmony position. Unfortunately, suppose this song is allegedly considered as the three-part song form, which needs to return to the first part and finish. In that case, it is also less appropriate due to the dominant closing harmony of the first part. The phrase extension happened due to an additional bar before the end of the consequence used for a short grupetto ornament in Hijaz mode. The use of Hijaz maqam that impacts the dominant chord, although it is written in the tonic minor key, is similar to flamenco tradition, especially to the Soleares genre.

Maqam Hijaz-Based Improvisation

The melodic structure of *Laksmana Raja di Laut* is built upon the *Hijaz* maqam, reflecting a strong influence of Islamic musical culture. The *Hijaz* maqam is one of the most recognizable modes in Arabic music and holds an important role in Islamic traditions, particularly in vocal expressions such as Qur’anic recitation and religious songs. Its presence in this song suggests a cultural and spiritual link between Malay musical expression and Islamic musical aesthetics. The *Hijaz* maqam is formed through the combination of three Arabic *jins* (tetrachords): *Hijaz*, *Nahawand*, and *Ajnas*. These characteristic intervals—especially the augmented second between the second and third scale degrees—give the maqam its unique and expressive flavor. In our transcription of *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, we identified this distinctive scale structure, confirming the use of the *Hijaz* maqam. This mode closely resembles the Phrygian Dominant scale in Western theory, though it functions differently in practice due to

its modal and ornamental context in Arabic and Islamic music. Therefore, the use of the *Hijaz* maqam in *Laksmāna Raja di Laut* not only shapes its melodic identity but also serves as a musical reflection of Islamic

cultural values embedded in Malay music traditions. This exemplifies how Islamic musical heritage has been adapted into local song forms, reinforcing the song's cultural depth and historical resonance.

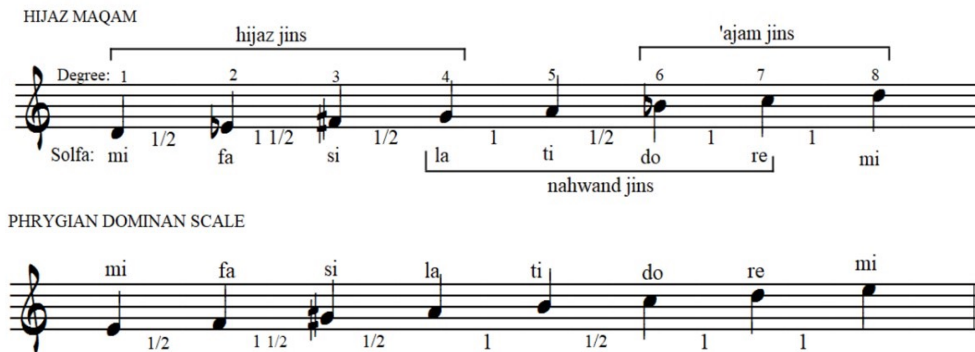


Figure 4. The similarity scales construction of the *Hijaz* and the Phrygian Dominant

Figure 4 illustrates the similarity between the *Hijaz* maqam and the Phrygian Dominant scale through their shared intervallic structure. Understanding the scale construction of both modes highlights how different musical cultures can produce similar tonal effects through distinct theoretical frameworks. This comparison is particularly relevant in analyzing *Laksmāna Raja di Laut*, which draws from Arabic musical traditions. Both the *Hijaz* and Phrygian Dominant scales share the same interval sequence: half tone - whole and a half tone - half tone - whole tone - half tone - whole tone - whole tone. In the transcription of *Laksmāna Raja di Laut*, the *Hijaz* maqam is tuned based on the actual pitch of the performance, as heard in the YouTube recording. In contrast, the Western Phrygian scale typically appears in a natural key signature, without accidentals. The difference lies not in the pitches themselves but in how the scales are constructed: the Western scale uses tetrachords (four-note segments), while the Arabic system uses *jins*, or modal building blocks. The *Hijaz* maqam in this song is built from three *jins*: *Hijaz* and *Nahawand*, each containing four notes (like tetrachords), and *'Ajam*, which consists of three notes. This shows a layered modal structure that differs in concept but parallels the tonal result of

the Western model. While both the *Hijaz* maqam and the Phrygian Dominant scale may sound similar to the ear, their underlying theoretical constructions reflect the distinct musical philosophies of Arabic and Western traditions. Recognizing these differences enriches our understanding of how *Laksmāna Raja di Laut* bridges musical systems while preserving its cultural roots.

The exploration of the *Hijaz* scale mode is prominently featured in the free vocal improvisation of the prologue section. This improvisatory opening, locally referred to as the “*raal*” in Indonesian Malay music, serves both an expressive and structural purpose, allowing the performer to establish the musical mode (maqam) and hint at the genre's stylistic character before the main melody begins. As shown in Figure 5 below, the “*raal*” functions as a non-metric, ornamented vocal passage that showcases the singer's vocal agility and interpretive creativity. It typically consists of three sub-sections, each emphasizing different facets of vocal technique and modal exploration. In *Laksmāna Raja di Laut*, the singer uses the *raal* to introduce the *Hijaz* maqam, weaving melismatic phrases and embellishments that reflect traditional Islamic musical aesthetics. Each sub-section culminates in a cadential

gesture, giving a sense of closure while simultaneously setting up the transition to the main lyrical content. This practice aligns with Malay performance traditions where the *raal* not only prepares the audience aurally but also affirms the singer’s skill and emotional expression. Through the *raal*, the performer engages with the *Hijaz*

maqam in a fluid and expressive manner, using ornamentation and modal gestures to introduce both the musical scale and the genre. This improvisatory section functions as a vital prelude that bridges cultural identity, vocal artistry, and musical structure in Malay song tradition.

(solo improvisation prologue)

Transcribed by Sevi Qurrotu A'yun (2021)
Revised by Andre Indrawan (2022)

Sung by Iyeth Bustami (from Zapin Dut 2003 album)
Recorded by Dreams Cape Productions, 2002

Figure5. The free melodic ad libitum with the *Hijaz* maqam mode in the vocal introductory section

The exploration of maqam in the solo vocal prologue is achieved through improvisation at the end of each sub-section, highlighting the performer’s creative use of various *jins* (tetrachord units) within the broader *Hijaz* maqam framework. This vocal improvisation serves both an expressive and structural function, enriching the melodic delivery while introducing the maqam system that underlies the main song. Each sub-section varies in length and melodic treatment, showcasing different *jins* that reflect stylistic flexibility within a consistent modal context. The improvisation is concentrated at the ends of syllables within each sub-section. In the first sub-section, where the singer utters the word “Zapin”, the melodic line begins with *Hijaz jins*, extends the final syllable using *Nahawand jins*, and concludes again with *Hijaz jins*—creating a layered and expressive descent. In the second sub-section, which consists of two short semi-phrases, the improvisation is more restrained. The first semi-phrase, “Aku dendangkan” (melodically

interpreted as an antecedent), begins in *Nahawand* and ends briefly in *Hijaz*. The second semi-phrase, “Lagu Melayu” (as the consequent), starts and ends with *Hijaz*, including a subtle ornament on the final syllable. The third sub-section, composed of a single word, “pelipur hati” that serves as a closing declaration, begins with ‘*Ajam jins*. The final syllable is elaborated more extensively using *Hijaz*, then concludes briefly with a return to ‘*Ajam jins*. This final movement creates a sense of closure while smoothly preparing the transition into the main body of the song, which is firmly rooted in the *Hijaz* maqam.

Performance Structure and Modal Implication

The performance structure of *Laksmana Raja di Laut* is characterized by the integration of vocal and instrumental sections, each contributing distinctively to the song’s overall form and expression. These components are strategically positioned to provide both

musical contrast and continuity, allowing for expressive vocal delivery and dynamic instrumental transitions that shape the flow of the performance. The vocal part consists of two major sections. The first is the prologue, locally known as the “*Raal*”, which is a free-

form vocal improvisation that introduces the song’s melodic mode and emotional tone. This section allows the singer to explore the *maqam* through ornamentation and vocal color, serving as a prelude to the main song.

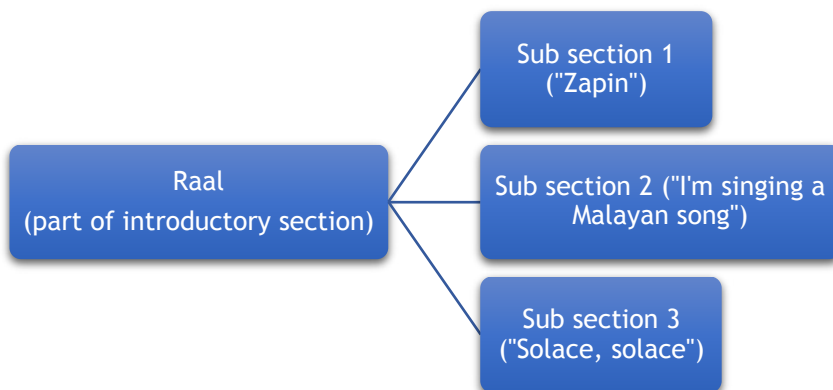


Figure 6. The construction of the “*raal*”, or the vocal introductory section

The *raal* section of the performance is structured into three distinct sub-sections, each carrying a specific function, beginning with the explicit mention of the term “*Zapin*”. This sequential structure reflects the performer’s intent to introduce not only the genre but also the cultural and emotional context of the song, aligning with traditions in Malay musical practice where vocal prologues serve to orient the listener. In the first sub-section, the singer introduces the term *Zapin*, identifying the performance as rooted in this well-known form of traditional Malay dance music. The mention of *Zapin* immediately signals the genre identity to the audience (see first line of the transcription). In the second sub-section, the singer clarifies her artistic intent—to sing a Malayan song within the *Zapin* tradition, establishing a framework that connects the musical form with cultural and regional expression. While *Zapin* is most commonly associated with Islamic Malay dance traditions (Hendra, 2023; Hidajat et al., 2021; Jailani et al., 2023; Suryani & Fitriah, 2019), several scholars also note that the term refers to the vocal genre that accompanies the dance (Setiawati et al., 2021), highlighting its dual

function. In the third sub-section, the singer delivers a personal message: her purpose in singing is to soothe and uplift the hearts of the audience. This statement reflects the traditional role of Malay music as a form of social and emotional connection, where music serves both aesthetic and communal functions. These three sub-sections of the *raal* not only establish the genre, cultural identity, and performer’s intention, but also demonstrate how *Zapin* functions as a holistic artistic expression—combining music, poetry, and spirituality—to engage and move the audience.

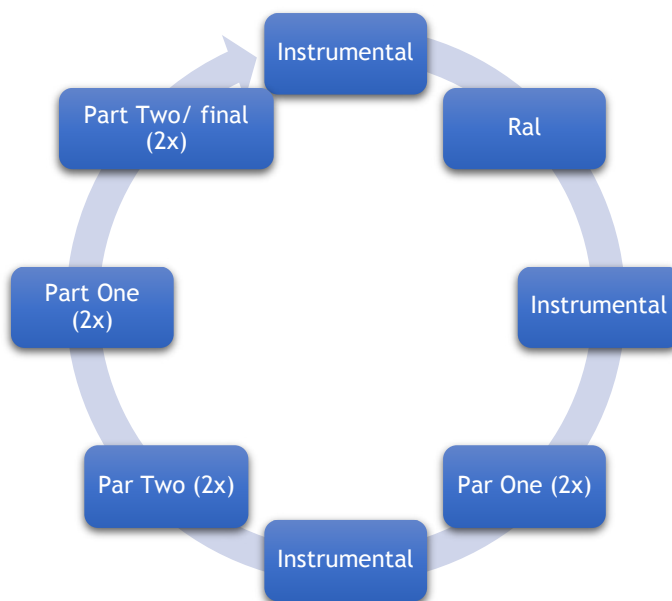


Figure 7. Round structure of lyeth Bustami’s performance version

The second vocal section presents the song’s main body, which is metrically structured and melodically complete, offering a striking contrast to the free-form prologue. While this section provides a clear musical form, instrumental inserts can obscure the recognition of the underlying structure and the relationship between its parts, especially for analysts unfamiliar with the performance style. Instrumental sections are strategically placed throughout the performance to shape its flow. The song begins with an instrumental introduction, which sets the tonal and rhythmic atmosphere before the vocals begin. Following the vocal prologue, an instrumental section appears and transitions into the metrically organized main song. As the main song unfolds, an additional instrumental bridge emerges between Part One and Part Two in the first stanza, serving as a unique divider in preserving a strong sense of thematic continuity. Notably, the performers consistently place interludes between the two parts of a stanza. However, they omit them after Part Two, where the song proceeds directly to the next stanza without an instrumental break. This structural choice suggests intentional variation. As an alternative to the hypothesis, analysts can

suspect that the structure starts from Part Two while Part One is like the middle part of the three-part song form structure. The arranger likely designed the placement of the seemingly unusual interlude to highlight Part Two, rather than Part One, as the thematic core of the song, mainly since the lyrics directly refer to the title, *Laksmna Raja di Laut*. This study confidently proposes that the song follows a two-part form, especially considering the previously discussed lyric structure—even if the order may initially appear unconventional. The interaction between the structured vocal section and the carefully placed instrumental parts enriches the overall performance. This thoughtful arrangement highlights the composition’s uniqueness by positioning the song’s central message in Part Two, offering a refreshing alternative to the more common placement in Part One.

The performance structure of the song “*Laksmna Raja di Laut*” by lyeth Bustami, as seen in the video, combines engaging vocal and instrumental elements with theatrical and dance movements. These instrumental segments, accompanied by dancers, provide contrast and create space

for audience anticipation and interaction within the context of Malay performing arts. Through the deliberate alternation of vocal and instrumental sections, the performance achieves a rich and balanced formal design. The video also features theatrical gestures and traditional Malay dances, which often appear during instrumental passages as a visual backdrop. These segments highlight the use of typical Malay instruments such as the gambus, tambourine, accordion, violin, and guitar. The dynamic interplay between improvisation and formal structure—blending solo vocals, instrumental interludes, and expressive movements—illustrates the complexity and depth of Malay musical and performative traditions.

Some critical audiences may question the placement of the instrumental interlude between Part One (Period A) and Part Two (Period B) instead of after Part Two or between the full song repetitions (A-B), which is more typical in many song forms. This structural decision may reflect an artistic choice by the arranger to draw special attention to Part Two as the primary thematic and emotional centerpiece of the composition. Since Part Two contains the exact textual phrase that appears in the song's title, its emphasis may be intended to signal its narrative or symbolic significance. From a textual perspective, the second period (Part Two) features the line "*Laksmana Raja di Laut*," directly referencing the title and thus possibly serving as the lyrical and thematic climax. Placing the interlude before this section helps to frame it as a musical arrival point, allowing listeners to reset and focus. From a harmonic perspective, the key of the song is G minor. Both Part One and Part Two end on the dominant chord (D major), without modulation or harmonic departure. This uniform cadence across sections suggests that the structural transition is not marked by harmonic contrast but rather by form and function—the interlude acts as a non-harmonic cue for formal separation and emphasis. Additionally, the positioning of the interlude maintains the flow of the

performance, offering a breath between narrative segments while keeping the tonal center intact. Thus, the placement of the interlude between Period A and Period B is a deliberate strategy to foreground Part Two as the central statement of the piece, both musically and textually. Rather than serving merely as a break, the interlude enhances the form by shaping the audience's perception of structural weight, drawing attention to the thematic heart of the song without altering its harmonic consistency.

This study highlights the structural and tonal characteristics of the song, revealing its foundation in the *Hijaz* maqam. The use of *Hijaz* maqam significantly shapes the song's tonal center and harmonic movement, influencing the perception of key and musical phrasing. Although the song is constructed on the *Hijaz* maqam, which resembles the G minor scale, it centers harmonically on the dominant, D major. This tonal orientation is evident in both sections of the song: the first part revolves around D major, while the second part, though beginning with a tonic chord, resolves again to the dominant. This pattern mirrors the characteristics of the Phrygian dominant scale and closely resembles the tonal behavior found in *Soleares*, a flamenco form that also emphasizes the dominant chord, despite being set in a minor key. Such similarities support the historical influence of Islamic musical culture on Spanish performing arts, particularly flamenco. These findings suggest that the song exhibits not only melodic but also harmonic traits associated with the *Hijaz* maqam, reinforcing its connection to broader Islamic musical traditions and their enduring influence on regional and global musical forms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of Islamic musical culture on the song *Laksmana Raja di Laut* is clearly manifested in three interconnected aspects. These elements collectively demonstrate how Islamic musical aesthetics have shaped and enriched

the form and expression of this Malay song, both melodically and structurally. First, the song's melodic foundation is built upon the *Hijaz* maqam, an Arabic scale widely used in Islamic musical practices, including religious chanting and traditional song. Second, the prologue, performed as a free vocal improvisation known as *raal*, reflects a stylistic affinity with Qur'anic recitation, particularly in its modal exploration, vocal ornamentation, and unmetered delivery. Third, the harmonic structure of the main song features the use of dominant chords as pivotal tonal centers—a characteristic reminiscent of Flamenco, a Spanish tradition that itself bears historical traces of Islamic musical influence during the Andalusian period. These elements collectively demonstrate how Islamic musical aesthetics have shaped and enriched the form and expression of this Malay song, both melodically and structurally. This observation reinforces the broader notion that traditional Malay music, especially within the context of Islamic cultural exchange, is not insular but has evolved through centuries of transregional interaction.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could explore the broader influence of Islamic musical culture on other traditional genres across Southeast Asia, especially in regions where Islam has historically played a prominent cultural role. Additionally, considering that many Malay performers are already well-versed in local musical and literary conventions, future studies may examine how a deeper understanding of maqam theory could contribute to more authentic and expressive interpretations in performance.

Recommendations for Practitioners

This research is especially relevant to practitioners—particularly popular singers—who perform repertoire rooted in the Malay musical tradition. While this study identifies elements of *Hijaz* maqam in one specific

Malay song, such features may not appear uniformly across the genre. When performers encounter repertoire influenced by *Hijaz* maqam, it is recommended they practice improvisation and ornamentation techniques rooted in maqam principles. Doing so can enhance the sonic authenticity and enrich the stylistic nuance of Malay songs shaped by Arabic musical idioms.

Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on a single musical work and does not claim that all Malay songs bear identical Islamic musical characteristics. The hybrid nature of cultural exchange between Malay and Islamic music calls for further in-depth musicological research. Such studies are needed to better map the variations, stylistic traits, and degrees of Islamic influence across different repertoires and performance practices.

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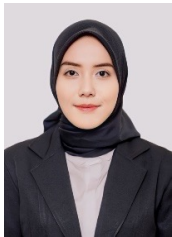
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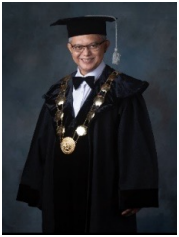


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Sevi Qurrotu A'yun, S.Sn., M.A., recently completed her Master's degree at the School of Graduate Studies, Gadjah Mada University, in 2024. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Education from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta (ISI Yogyakarta), where she studied from 2017 to 2021. During her undergraduate years, she was actively involved in various student organizations, particularly those focusing on jazz music. She frequently participated in jam sessions, music workshops, and other collaborative artistic events. In addition to her musical pursuits, she represented her university as a Qur'anic reciter in the National Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an for university students held in Aceh, Northern Sumatra Province. Under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suryati, she completed her undergraduate thesis on the application of maqam Hijaz in the popular Malay song *Laksmana Raja di Laut*, which forms the subject of this current publication. During her Master's program (2022-2024), she was actively engaged in community service projects, focusing on creating inclusive spaces for people with disabilities through the performing arts. Her activities included organizing live concerts for individuals with special needs and performing traditional gamelan music. Currently, she works as a professional vocal coach based in Yogyakarta, contributing to the local music scene through education and performance.

Biodata of Authors



Andre Indrawan is a Professor of Music at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta. He earned his Bachelor of Music with Honours in 1986 from the Department of Music, Faculty of Arts, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta. He holds two Master's degrees: a Master of Humanities in Performance Arts Studies (1994) from the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, and a Master of Music Studies (2000) from the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, Australia. In 2010, he was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Performing Arts and Fine Arts from Gadjah Mada University. In addition to his academic credentials, he holds high-level professional qualifications in classical guitar, including a Teaching Certificate from the Yamaha Music Foundation, Tokyo (1996), and the Licentiate of Music, Australia (L.Mus.A.) from the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB), Melbourne (1997). He has served as a full-time lecturer at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta since 1987. He led the Department of Music as Head from 2011 to 2019, across two consecutive terms. In recognition of his long-standing academic and professional contributions, he was appointed Professor of Music in October 2023.

Research Gate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andre-Indrawan-3>