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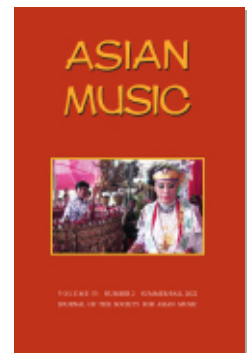
The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk, and Syncretic Traditions by Patricia Matusky and Tan Sooi Beng (review)

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The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk, and Syncretic Traditions, second ed. Patricia Matusky and Tan Sooi Beng. SOAS Musicology Series. London: Routledge, 2017. xxii + 438 pp., 603 b&w illustrations, notes, bibliography, discography, videography, index + two CDs. ISBN: 9781472465047 (hardcover), \$132.00; ISBN: 9781315223025 (e-book), \$38.00.

In the past five decades, efforts have been made by the Malaysian government to document, preserve, and promote the traditional performing arts as part of the nation's plan to bridge the social and economic gap between the major populations. This led to the establishment of *Kompleks Budaya Negara* (National Cultural Complex) in 1972, after the National Cultural Congress a year earlier. The National Cultural Complex was later known as *Istana Budaya* (Palace of Culture), where traditional performers were employed as instructors, and performances were held. This was followed by the opening of *Akademi Seni Kebangsaan* (National Arts Academy) in 1994. Now known as ASWARA, the academy offers tertiary education in traditional performing arts including *makyung* and *wayang kulit*. Since music was included in the national school curriculum, there have been demands for more music school-teachers and instructors. Students are also taught traditional performing arts in many schools and universities as part of extracurricular activities. Publications and teaching materials for traditional music and performing arts have still been lacking, however.

Matusky and Tan's original publication *The Music of Malaysia* was an important contribution at a time when there was a dire need for source books on Malaysian music. It was written especially for music teachers, university lecturers, researchers, and the general public with some understanding in music. This book was first published in Malay in 1997 and followed by an English version in 2004. It was a culmination of years of work by the two ethnomusicologists, with additional materials by a number of scholars in Malaysian music. This new edition, published by Routledge in 2017, has been fully revised and includes two audio CDs of field recordings. *The Music of Malaysia* is now accessible to a much wider readership and is available in both print and e-book versions.

The book is stunning in its scope and coverage. It is divided into six chapters, preceded by an introduction that provides an overview of Malaysia's history, society, politics, and economy. Here the authors provide a historical timeline of Malaysia's musical development and outline five musical categories that encompass the major ethnic groups of the country. This inclusivity shows the ethnic diversity and multicultural nature of the country. The music performed in these societies is categorized as classical, folk, syncretic, and contemporary art music. Although some of the performances may overlap,

this categorization greatly facilitates the research and documentation of Malaysian music and performing arts.

The first chapter looks into the music of major theatrical forms, which comprise shadow puppetry, dance and opera, and musical theater. It gives an overview of the Malay shadow puppet play *wayang kulit*; Chinese *po-te-hi* glove puppet theater; *makyung*, *menora*, *mekmulung*, and *randai* dance dramas; the Malay opera *Bangsawan*; *boria* musical theatre; and Chinese opera. Drawing from Matusky's own research, the *wayang kulit* is well explained here, together with transcriptions and analysis of the music. Samples of *wayang kulit* music taken from her field recordings in the 1970s are also provided on the accompanying CDs. *Makyung*, an ancient Malay theater from Kelantan that uses the same *tetawak* and *gendang* instruments as the *wayang kulit* with an addition of the *rebab* (or bowed lute), also receives lengthy coverage with examples of its music. After a brief look at *mekmulung* from Kedah and *randai* from Negri Sembilan, the chapter moves to the Malay opera *Bangsawan*, which appeared as a result of British colonization of the Malay Peninsula. Its music comprises songs that have a combination of Malay and Western musical elements. This can be heard through recordings of two 1930s *Bangsawan* songs found on the CDs. The chapter ends with a look at *menora* folk dance theater found in the states of Penang, Kedah, and Kelantan.

The second chapter analyzes the music of the major dance forms. It starts with a look at *tari asyik* and *joget gamelan*, two dance forms with musical accompaniment that are considered classical art traditions. The *tari asyik* is from Kelantan, and *joget gamelan* originates from Pahang and Terengganu. Both these forms developed in the palace and were performed by specially trained dancers who could also play the musical instruments. Other dance forms covered in this chapter include the *zapin* dance introduced by Arab communities in Johor, *ngajat* and *datum julud* dances of Sarawak, *sumazau* and *magarang* dances of Sabah, and the Chinese lion dance. The *zapin* performance is explained using illustrations of accompanying instruments, transcriptions of *taksim* (played by the *gambus*), and melodies of *zapin* pieces. "Lagu Gambus Palembang," a *zapin* dance piece recorded by Mohd Anis and Matusky, is also included in the CDs. The lion dance, brought by Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century, ends this section on the dance forms of Malaysia.

The third chapter focuses on the music of percussion ensembles. The ensembles highlighted here are the *caklempong* from Negri Sembilan, Sabah's *kulintangan*, and the hanging gong ensembles of Sarawak. The *caklempong* is a musical tradition brought to Malaysia by the Minangkabau people of western Sumatra. Similar to *caklempong*, *kulintangan* is a gong-row ensemble from Sabah, composed of small, knobbed bronze gongs arranged horizontally in a

wooden rack. Finally, the authors discuss hanging gong ensembles found in Sarawak and Sabah that comprise three to seven gongs, played to a great extent by women. The second part of the chapter discusses the drum ensembles of *kompang*, *rebana ubi*, and the Chinese 24 Season Drums from Johor Bahru, a city at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula. It is interesting to note the inclusion of struck and stamping bamboo-and-wood ensembles from the Indigenous peoples of Sarawak and aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia. The chapter ends with a look at the *nobat*, a Malay court ensemble, and *gendang silat*, an ensemble or music that accompanies the Malay martial art *silat*. Both these ensembles are percussion based with additional wind instruments.

Chapter 4 discusses vocal and solo instrumental music performed in non-theatrical contexts. Beginning with Muslim religious chanting called *zikir*, the chapter details the meanings and types of *zikir*, including musical transcriptions. Lesser-known *zikir*-based performances from Kelantan such as the *zikir rebana*, *rebana kercing*, and *dikir laba* are also mentioned. This is followed by traditional theater *rodan* from Terengganu and *hadrah*, performed in the states of Perlis and Kedah. Both these kinds of theater originated in the Middle East. Another Islamic form of performance called *nasyid* is also explained here, including its history, musical instruments, and analysis. Malaysian vocal music is further discussed by looking into welcoming songs from Sabah and Sarawak and the storytelling musicians known as *Tarik Selampit* and *Awang Batil*. In the instrumental music section, we are introduced to various types of aerophones, chordophones, and idiophonic instruments made of bamboo and wood, which include the mouth organs, flutes, tube zithers, lutes, and jaws harp.

Chapter 5, “Social Popular Music and Ensembles,” begins with detailed explanations of *ronggeng* social dance. *Ronggeng* became popular in the states of Penang and Melaka through amusement parks in the 1930s and 1940s, where male patrons would buy tickets to dance with female dancers. Also found in Penang and Melaka, *dondang sayang* is a performance in which a singer sings a 4-line *pantun*, or Malay quatrain, and is answered by another singer. A *dondang sayang* ensemble consists of a violin, *rebana* drums, and a knobbed gong and can also be found in Riau and Sumatra. Examples of *pantun* are provided, and samples of *dondang sayang* music can be heard on the accompanying CDs. Although originating from Jakarta, *keroncong* has become a popular ensemble in Malaysia and was performed in *Bangsawan* in the 1920s. Today, *keroncong* pieces have become standards and are enjoyed by Malaysians together with *asli* and *joget* numbers. The final section of this chapter looks at Indian classical music in Malaysia. The Indian community, totaling about 7 percent of the population, keep their primarily Karnatak (South Indian)

musical traditions alive through various societies and associations, and many musicians from India have been brought to train local performers.

The final chapter provides an overview of Malaysian contemporary art and popular music, areas that were virtually untouched by ethnomusicologists and music scholars until recently. The Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) Orchestra, formed in the early 1960s, was where a number of composers produced their work. Johari Salleh, Alfonso Soliano, and Gus Steyn not only played and arranged for the orchestra but also composed. These composers paved the way for more serious compositions in Malaysia. Western-educated composers began producing works based on post-World War II techniques fused with local and other Asian influences. Malaysian popular music also gets a mention here, an area of study that has been gaining momentum in recent years. It has a long history that goes back to the days of *Bangsawan* and Malay films and is largely influenced by Malay folk and Anglo- and Latin-American dance music. This section includes the late 1990s, covering genres of *nasyid kontemporari*, rock of various subgenres, *irama* Malaysia (Malaysian beat), world music, and hip-hop. The chapter ends with a discussion about issues of state censorship and the influence of “undesirable” Western culture on Muslim youths, topics that are relevant to this day.

The Music of Malaysia is clearly written, with ample pictures and musical examples, and is accessible to specialists and students. It is a significant contribution to the study not only of Malaysian performing arts but of Southeast Asia as well. It is encouraging to see that the music of the major populations and ethnic groups of Malaysia are fairly covered although varied in depth and details. The book also provides an extensive bibliography, discography, and videography, a thorough index, and the welcome addition of two CDs of musical samples. *The Music of Malaysia* has become a must-read book for anyone interested in Malaysian arts and culture. Although there is still room for additional materials and analyses, the book remains the most comprehensive documentation and study of Malaysia’s music to date.

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