# Composition of Gamat Music:
# A Hybrid Culture of the Minangkabau Coastal Community

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**Abstract**
*Gamat* is a genre of traditional Minangkabau music which constitutes a hybridization of Melayu, Indian, Minangkabau, and Portuguese musical elements. This music developed in the towns of Padang, Pariaman, Solok, Padang Panjang, and Painan, and other towns in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Today, *gamat* is still a popular form of entertainment music in the West Sumatra community. This musical ensemble performs melancholic songs in a slow tempo and also lively music (*joget*) in a fast tempo, with metaphoric texts of *pantun* in the Minangkabau language. This musical composition is based on songs of traditional *gamat* music, such as *Kaparinyo* and *Joget*, which are developed in two forms - in the form of an arrangement, and in 'contemporary' form. The arrangement form follows the basic principles of traditional *gamat* songs with Minangkabau lyrics; the 'contemporary' form abandons traditional patterns and introduces new explorative rhythmic patterns and melodies that are enhanced by the use of conventional Western musical instruments with an approach of hybridity.
**Keywords**: Composition of *gamat* music, hybridity, tradition, arrangement, and contemporary

## Introduction

G*amat* is a genre of traditional Minangkabau music that is made up of the hybridization of several cultures, including Melayu, Minangkabau, Indian, and European (Portuguese) cultures. It originated as a form of Melayu music performed by musicians from various parts of Sumatra to entertain migrants in the port areas of coastal towns in West Sumatra. In the middle of the 17th century, people in trading port towns on the Minangkabau coast (Barus, Tiku, and Pariaman) were already familiar with the 'new' music and dance of Portuguese influence. Portuguese traders formed friendships with local rulers, such as the "small kings" who ruled as representatives of The Great King, Raja Alam Pagaruyung who lived in the hinterland of Minangkabau. Like the Portuguese, traders from Gujarat, Persia, and other countries, had also established close relations with local rulers since the beginning of the 16th century (when Aceh ruled over the coastal area of Minangkabau). As a symbol of this friendship, the Portuguese brought gifts, including musical instruments such as guitars, violins, tambourines, and flutes, which they also sold to local nobility and other traders (Kartomi 1981:370 via Mulyadi, 1994: 154). According to Hendrizal, violins, accordions, and guitars were some of the instrument products of foreign cultures that merged with *gamat* music. Another sign of assimilation can be seen in the scale used in *gamat* music, which follows the diatonic scale system that is a product of Western culture (Hendrizal, 2012).

The Melayu music performed in the port towns of Minangkabau at that time was already a combination of Melayu, Indian, Arabic, and even European music cultures. The instruments used in this ensemble already included several instruments from India and Europe, such as the harmonium and violin. The music was often referred to as *bandar* music, or port town music because of its origins in coastal port towns, in particular Padang. According to Navis, *gamat* was probably introduced by the Portuguese through Melayu sailors. The music was used to entertain the ship's crew as there was an element of dance from Melayu art in the music (Navis in Martarosa, 2008: 26).

The performance of Melayu music attracted the attention of Minangkabau and (Tamil) Indian musicians, who joined in with the Melayu musicians. The addition of Minangkabau and Indian musicians influenced the form of music performed. The rhythmic beat of Indian music such as *chalti* fused with the Melayu music. These Minangkabau and Indian musicians subsequently developed their own musical style which was based on the Melayu music but included elements of traditional Minangkabau music and literature such as the use of *pantun* in the Minangkabau language for the lyrics of the text. This meant that the Melayu language was no longer used exclusively in the *pantun* lyrics. The musical version created by these Minangkabau and Tamil Indian musicians became the earliest version of *gamat* music in Padang.

Port towns such as Padang, Pariaman, and Painan, along with a number of other port towns on the west coast of Minangkabau, were important port towns for doing trade with other Asian nations, such as India (especially traders from the areas of Bengal, Gujarat, and Tamil), Persia, Saudi Arabia, China, Java, and Malaya, as well as European countries (Portugal, the Netherlands, and England). This contact with various other nations was not only in the field of trade but also in the field of culture, including music and dance. In the field of music,

the diatonic tradition began to develop, while in the field of dance, "social dances" were introduced which prioritized recreational values (Martamin, 1978). One of the influences of Portuguese music that is still found in *gamat* music today is the song *Kaparinyo*. *Kaparinyo* is one of the main songs in a *gamat* performance (Rizaldi, et al., 2018: 157). According to Victor Ganap and Martarosa (2016; see also Rizaldi, et al., 2018: 158): "The introduction of Portuguese-Melayu dance in Minangkabau was brought about by Minangkabau migrants who were returning from Malacca. Another opinion is that the dance was introduced by a group of Tamil "Portuguese" from Malacca who immigrated to areas of Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra. This theory is supported by the existence of Tamil "Portuguese" communities in Minangkabau coastal areas, who are known to be one of the groups supporting *gamat* music, including *Kaparinyo*."

*Gamat* music has numerous songs, both in traditional and popular (modern) genres. *Gamat* music has unique musical and literary characteristics. The musical characteristics of traditional *gamat* songs can be seen in the form, structure, technique, melody, and rhythm or beat of the music, while the literary characteristics are found in the song lyrics, which are in the form of Minangkabau *pantun* texts. There are two kinds of *gamat* songs - melancholic and joyful, and the rhythms or tempo can also be divided into two types: *langgam*, with a slow tempo (M.M. 60-63) for melancholic songs, and *joget*, in a fast tempo (M.M. 96-104) for songs with a joyful character (Rizaldi, et al., 2018: 155). Songs in *langgam* tempo include the songs *Kaparinyo, Sarunai Aceh, Mati Dibunuah, Perak-perak, Siligi*, and so on, while the best known songs in *joget* tempo are also variations of *Kaparinyo*. *Gamat* has undergone various developments to become a popular musical genre, by including elements of other popular musical forms to create *gamat-pop, gamat-remix, gamat-melayu*, and so on. The fusion that has occurred in *gamat* music was the source of inspiration for creating this "*gamat* hybrid" musical composition.

## Definition of *Gamat* Music

The word *gamat* is written and and pronounced in three different versions by the Minangkabau people: *gamat, gamad*, and *gamaik*. Generally people pronounce the word as *gamaik*. Whenever there is a performance associated with this music, people will refer to the music as *gamaik*, or *bagamaik* (the activity of performing *gamat* music, along with its dance, using a scarf and handkerchief). However, if it is pronounced as *gamad*, other people will still understand it to mean *gamat* music. Most researchers and writers, such as (Navis, 1984; Rizaldi, 1994; Martarosa, 2008, 2016. 2017; Surayya, 2011; Murniati, 2017; Hendrizal, 2012) prefer the spelling *gamat*, and it is rarely written as *gamad*. Nevertheless, some *gamat* musicians do tend to spell the word as *gamad*. For example, Rahim Cik (a traditional *gamat* musician from Padang), who writes that: the word written as *gamad* is an abbreviation of the phrase "*Gabungan Musik Alunan Daerah*" - GAMAD (Assimilation of Regional Music), because *gamat* music is a combination of music from several regions, such as Medan (Melayu), Malaya, Portugal, and Minangkabau (Rizaldi, 1994: 56-57; see also Murniati 2017: 14-16). Another *gamat* music informant in Padang says that the word should be spelled *gamad* (ending in a **d**). *Gamad* is said to be an acronym of **ga** - short for *gazal*, and **mad** - short for Melayu Deli which comes from North Sumatra. Melayu Deli is a genre of Melayu music which is extremely popular in Sumatra. Hence, the acronym *gamad* used by these artists/informants is based on their understanding of the several different musical and cultural elements contained in *gamat* music.

According to the official Indonesian dictionary, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia,* the definition of *gamat* is quite simple: song, touch, gesture. *Bergamat* means to sing; *menggamat* means to intonate (Team of Editors, 2014: 409). Navis (1984: 276) gives the following definition: "The word *gamat* probably originates from the word *gamit* which means to touch someone with the fingers as an invitation to chat or for another purpose. Perhaps, the gesture of giving a person a scarf or handkerchief as an invitation to dance is also another form of *menggamit*, which is what brought the name of this art form to become *gamat*."

## Work Concept

According to Rizaldi, et al. (2018: 155): "*Gamat* music has unique characteristics in its music and its literature. The unique musical characteristics are in aspects of melody and rhythm, while the unique literary characteristics are in the song lyrics, which are in the form of *pantun*. There are two main characters of *gamat* melodies, namely melancholic and joyful, while the rhythmic patterns or beat of the percussion can also be divided into two kinds: *langgam*, with a slow tempo for melancholic songs, and *joget*, in a fast tempo for songs with a joyful character. The special features and character of *gamat* music were used as the basis for creating this new work. Traditionally, the concept of *gamat* music is only played on certain instruments, such as an accordion, violin, bass guitar, and two-headed drum (*gendang*), by an ensemble consisting of between 5 and 8 instrumentalists and singers. This new composition of *gamat* music is a development of various aspects of *gamat* music, including its musical elements, instruments, and the orientation of treatment, from traditional, to modern, and contemporary. The development of musical elements includes aspects of melody, rhythm (*langgam* and *joget*), and other characteristics of *gamat* music such as its song structure. The development of aspects of instrumentation includes

the addition of a number of other instruments outside the traditional *gamat* ensemble, such as conventional Western instruments, to provide a new feeling and a different character from the traditional music. The creation of this new work uses a 'contemporary' approach. The word contemporary here refers to a development of rhythm and melody which is still based - albeit minimally - on traditional *gamat* music, then combined with rhythmic and melodic patterns using different instruments, based on various explorations of rhythm and melody. In this way, the sensation of the primary elements, features, and character of *gamat* music are still presented but with a new interpretation. For example, the character of a melancholic song with *langgam* rhythms or tempo and a joyful song with *joget* rhythms are combined with new melodic elements and accompanied by other instruments, so that the form of the work is no longer traditional, yet still retains the general structure of a composition.

This composition consists of two sections, each with a different character, namely traditional and 'contemporary'. The first section presents traditional characteristics of *gamat* music, or in other words it is a new arrangement of traditional songs. The songs performed are *Kaparinyo* and *joget* songs, arranged in the format of a combo band with conventional instruments such as electric guitar (melody and bass), electric keyboard, and a drum set, together with instruments used in traditional *gamat* music, such as accordion, violin, *gendang*, and tambourine. The melodic characteristic, known as *garinyiak*, which defines the identity of *gamat* music, is still present. According to Rizaldi, *garinyiak* is a term that describes ornamental musical embellishments, which are similar to the various ornaments found in classical music, such as mordent, triller, gruppetto, glissando, and portamento, produced using a difficult playing technique; every player has a different way of interpretation when playing these ornaments (Rizaldi in Hendrizal, 2012). The below is an example of the basic notation of the *Kaparinyo* song arranged.



In addition, the structure of presentation of each *gamat* song that serves as the musical concept is still retained. This structure is: 1) the song melody and its text; 2) the center of the song (melodic introduction); 3) the melodic interlude (doorway to the song) leading to the vocal entrance; 4) the closing song melody; and 5) the accompanying *gendang* motif (Rizaldi, 1994:109). This structure is an extremely important concept in every *gamat* song. The melodic interlude is a short melody played by the violin, which signals the vocal entrance. Without this melody, the singer would be unable to continue singing.

The *pantun* is presented using a singing style of Melayu music and *gamat*, in particular in the ornamentation of the vocal melody. The unique characteristic of *gamat* vocal ornamentation lies in its *cengkok* and *garinyiak*. According to Hendrizal, *cengkok* often introduce ornamental pitches using ornaments consisting of three, five, six, or seven embellishing notes, and this is a characteristic of Melayu songs in general, as well as *gamat* songs. The *cengkok* technique plays an important role for the *gamat* singer, and the ability to improvise in any particular song is a special skill that only *gamat* singers possess (Hendrizal, 2012). Other features that appear in this section are the song lyrics or text, presented in the Minangkabau language in the form of *pantun*. The *pantun* texts used are a combination of traditional texts and newly created texts. One of the *pantun* texts used tells about the cross-ethnic and cross-cultural community in the town of Padang, in West Sumatra. Padang is the provincial capital of West Sumatra, situated in the Minangkabau cultural area and inhabited by four important ethnic groups which make up the unique culture that characterizes the people of Padang, namely the ethnic Minangkabau community (the majority), the ethnic (Tamil) Indian community, the Chinese community, and the ethnic Nias community. These four ethnic groups have different cultural backgrounds but all of them played an important role in the early formation of *gamat* music and its development up to the present day. The assimilation of musical cultures, specifically of India, Melayu , Europe (The West), and Minangkabau has made *gamat* music one of the hybrid music cultures of Minangkabau. Meanwhile, the Nias community plays an important role both

as instrumentalists and singers of *gamat* music, while the Chinese are prominent in the field of logistics, and as supporters of the music, because the element of Chinese music that exists in Padang is difficult to combine with *gamat* music, especially the aspects of its scale and its musical character.

Examples of song texts:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Urang Padang jalan barampek* | (Four Padang people walking together, |
| *Cabiaklah cabiak tapi kainnyo* | The edge of the cloth is torn |
| *Iyo nan ilang indak kadapek* | What is lost cannot be found |
| *Cari nan lain kagantinyo.* | Find another instead) |
| *Ka Tiku kito bamain-main* | (To Tiku we go to play |
| *Ambiaklah gundi yo kapatanak* | Take a *gundi* fruit/wood to cook |
| *Bialah suku balain-lain* | Let our ethnic groups be different |
| *Dek seni kito badunsak* | Because in art we are brothers) |

In the first line of the first *pantun* above, "*urang Padang jalan barampek*" (four Padang people walking together), the "four" refers to four people with different ethnicities: the first is Minangkabau, the second is Indian, the third is Chinese, and the fourth is Nias. This *pantun* tells about a person who is loved, but has already gone or perhaps even passed away. It is impossible ever to have back this person who is loved, because he or she has already left or died. So, there is no need to be sad, but instead it is better to look for another person. The third and fourth lines of the second *pantun*, /*bialah suku balain-lain// dek seni kito badunsanak*/ (Let our ethnic groups be different, because in art we are brothers), emphasize that although there are four different ethnic groups, because of art (*gamat*), they are all brothers.

The second section of this new composition of *gamat* music has a 'contemporary' character. Since the 1980s, *gamat* music in Padang, and in West Sumatra in general, has developed from a traditional music of mixed cultures to a more 'popular' and industrial form of music. Many artists of *gamat* music have made arrangements of *gamat* music in more modern and popular forms, by integrating other musical elements, such as *gamat-remix, gamat pop, gamat-Melayu*, as well as altering the character of *langgam* and *joget* songs to give them a more popular beat. This kind of *gamat* creation is more often performed by a combo band. In the second section of this new work, the treatment tends to be oriented more towards a 'contemporary' style that is no longer bound by the structural rules of musical performance that exist in *gamat* music. Aspects of rhythm, melody, and a combination of the two are arranged to suit a contemporary taste by presenting rhythmic patterns and short melodies using instruments that are not commonly found in *gamat* music.

The 'contemporary' approach mentioned here refers more specifically to the general understanding of contemporary music in Indonesia. Many compositions of new music in Indonesia are based on the traditional music of different ethnic groups, such as Java, Sunda, Bali, Minangkabau, Batak, and other areas, and treat various different features in ways that no longer adhere to the existing conventions of the traditional music that serves as the source of inspiration for the idea of creation. The methods used vary from one composer to another. Dieter Mack, a German composer who for many years lived and taught music in Indonesia, states that the criteria for being contemporary is uniqueness, or an image of "complete freedom". The method for arranging/composing material is not considered important, as long as it includes elements that are new, even spectacular (Dieter Mack, 2001: 35-36). This means that the music created by a composer is music that is completely different from its traditional source, and may even carry out explorations with utter freedom, using its own musical grammar.

The contemporary approach in this new composition of *gamat* music is not an entirely free form of exploration but rather remains within an aesthetic control that can be enjoyed by appreciators who are not musicians. It presents rhythmic patterns and beats that are not commonly used in *gamat* music, along with a number of new musical instruments. The principle of this kind of 'contemporary' approach may perhaps be compared with the approach of modernism, which Waridi describes in his analysis of Javanese karawitan/gamelan.

> "The approach of 'modernism' is an effort to reformulate idioms (of Javanese karawitan) in new forms. The process of creation does not interpret a repertoire that already exists. In the terminology of karawitan craftsmanship, this kind of method is still interpreted with a variety of meanings and definitions. 'Modernity' can be defined without having to dichotomize tradition and non-tradition. In this context, the definition built places more emphasis on the attitude of the artist in creating his new works without having to look whether or not his craftsmanship is still strongly influenced by traditional idioms. More importance is placed on the fact that the creation of his work reflects 'modernity'. Others may define it as a form of karawitan craftsmanship that no longer thinks about traditional conventions. Idioms of traditional karawitan are regarded as elements that can be interpreted freely by the creating artist. (…) In order to present a nuance of newness, it is not uncommon also for a creator to select instruments based on the musicality of his craftsmanship. Hence, this approach has more freedom to process traditional karawitan idioms, in terms of structure, instrumentation, pulsation, and playing technique" (Waridi, 2008: 295-296).

The principle of treating a work with an approach of modernism such as Waridi describes here is also applied in the treatment of the second part of this *gamat* composition. Karawitan can be analogized with other traditional Indonesian musical genres outside the culture of gamelan music.

## Method of Composition
### 1. Preparation and exploration
After determining the concept of the work, the next stage was to prepare the musical material, or the selection of traditional *gamat* songs from the repertoire of *langgam* and *joget*. These traditional songs were explored and developed in a number of melodic variations, along with the accompaniment and form of the composition. The next step was to prepare the instruments that were to be used. In addition to the aspect of composition, players were also chosen to match the instruments used, and singers were chosen who had a vocal timbre suitable for the character of *gamat* music. The exploration included a search for a variety of musical material that could be used in the composition. An exploration of various musical instruments was carried out, including guitar, violin, and other plucked string instruments, as well as percussion instruments such as *gendang* and a drum set. Through the string instruments, new melodies were discovered that were not related to *gamat* songs, but were sourced from particular musical themes of *gamat* songs, using manual techniques and effects. Through the percussion instruments, an exploration was made of rhythmic patterns and beats not commonly associated with *gamat* music, such as soul, funk, and funky jazz. All the musical material resulting from the exploration provided a stock of vocabulary, some of which was not used.

### Assigning of material and rehearsals
The material that had been prepared for the composition was taught to the players in sectional rehearsals and joint rehearsals. The sectional rehearsals focused on particular sections. For example, the melody for the opening section of the composition, which is played on violin, accordion, voice, wind instruments, and other instruments, was rehearsed in separate groups. Other material, such as the various rhythmic patterns and accompaniment, was also taught in sections. When the players had mastered the material well, a joint rehearsal was held to bring the different parts together. Thus, the material for the different parts of the composition was taught separately, then followed with a combined rehearsal. The purpose was to make the rehearsals more effective and allow more rehearsal time for all the players. Exceptions were made for the professional and more experienced musicians, who were allowed room for improvisation and stimulus to develop and interpret their own parts. They were only given the basic material, then allowed the 'freedom' to develop their own contemporary interpretation. The Figures 1 and 2 below show examples of the exercises performed separately.



**Figure 1.** Singer is practicing vocals separately due to the covid-19 pandemic. (Photo: Yunaidi, 2021)



**Figure 2.** Two brass musicians doing rehearsal separately. (Photo: Yunaidi, 2021)

## Composition/Formation

When all the material for the composition had been practised and mastered by the players, the next stage was to arrange the material according to the different sections of the composition in order to create a complete composition. After the form of the composition had been established, rehearsals continued with all the players, to correct and improve various parts, with the possibility of making a number of changes. The rehearsals in this stage aimed to reinforce what had already been learned so that the target of the composition could be achieved.

## Evaluation

The evaluation stage was directed towards non-technical matters, external to the music but related to the composition. For example, the cohesiveness of the musicians, their comprehension and internalization of the music, their expression, behavior, and communication, the balance between the sounds of different instruments, the setting of the players and instruments, and other things that were agreed upon in the composition, such as the codes or signals for each section of the composition and between the different instruments.

## Performance

In order to avoid the risk of performing during the Covid-19 pandemic, the performance of this composition was held virtually. Nevertheless, before the actual performance took place, a performance simulation was held in the form of a general rehearsal.

## Conclusion

This source of this musical composition is the songs of traditional *gamat* music, such as *Kaparinyo* (song two) and Joget songs, which are developed in two forms, as an arrangement and in a 'contemporary' form,  in two sections. The arrangement constitutes the first part of the composition; the songs played are *Kaparinyo* and *joget* songs, which are arranged in the form of combo band music, played by conventional instruments, including electric guitar (melody and bass), electric keyboard, and a drum set, together with traditional instruments of *gamat* music such as an accordion, violin, *gendang*, and tambourine, with lyrics in the Minangkabau language. The 'contemporary' form makes up the second part of the work; the treatment used no longer adheres to the rules of the musical concept of the *gamat* tradition. Aspects of rhythm, melody, and a combination of the two are arranged to suit contemporary taste, by presenting rhythmic patterns and melodies not commonly found in *gamat* music, such as soul, funk, and funky jazz, played on string instruments and percussion instruments using manual techniques and effects.

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