



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND THEATER ARTS IN WAYANG KULIT

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Abstract

Art is one element of culture, which is a form of human activity for a specific purpose, therefore art communicates the values that underlie human actions. One form of art is the shadow puppet show. Shadow puppets are an Indonesian cultural heritage that is identical to the traditional culture of the Javanese people. Wayang comes from the word 'Ma Hyang' which means going to the spiritual spirit and god or God Almighty. There are also those who interpret wayang as a Javanese term meaning 'shadow', this is because the audience can also watch the puppet from behind the screen or just its shadow. The shadow puppet show combines various elements, including stories, characters, gamelan music, and unique shadow movements (Setiawan, 2020). This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection techniques in the form of literature studies, document or text studies and observations, this study aims to explore the relationship between gamelan music and theater arts in wayang kulit and how the two elements complement each other to create a holistic aesthetic experience for the audience and both function to strengthen the narrative, aesthetics, and emotions in wayang kulit performances (Noorsetya et al., 2024). In addition to being an accompaniment, gamelan music also plays an important role in building the emotions of the story, working with the puppeteer as the director and visual controller of wayang kulit. The relationship between music and theater arts in wayang kulit cannot be separated and is able to create a deep aesthetic experience for the audience.

Keywords: *Music, Theater, Wayang Kulit, Gamelan*

INTRODUCTION

Wayang kulit is a traditional Indonesian performing art that has a long history and is rich in cultural heritage (Sukirno & Ningrum, 2024). As a medium of storytelling, wayang kulit is not only a form of entertainment but also a vehicle for conveying moral values, philosophical teachings, and historical narratives. The

stories performed often draw from ancient epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which are adapted to reflect local wisdom and social issues. The dalang, or puppeteer, plays a central role in breathing life into the characters, using voice, movement, and music to engage the audience. This multifaceted art form has been passed down through generations, making it an essential part of Indonesia's

intangible cultural heritage and a symbol of national identity.



Figure 1: Wayang Kulit show
<https://suratdunia.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Wayang-kulit-Desti-Lomnath-avec-son-dholak-2.jpg>

Wayang has a very close relationship with the social, cultural, and religious life of the Javanese people (Irawan et al., 2023). Wayang is a comprehensive art, has an aesthetic function, entertainment, and is full of sacredness (Janos & Rokhim, 2023). The word wayang can be interpreted as a picture or imitation of a human made of leather, wood, and so on to show a play or story. The play is told by a person called a puppeteer. Another meaning of the word wayang is ayang-ayang (shadow), because what is seen is a shadow on the screen. Besides that, some interpret shadows as imagination. Any form in the wayang is adjusted to the behavior of the character imagined in imagination, for example a good person, depicted as having a thin body, sharp eyes, and so on. While evil people have wide mouths, wide faces, and so on, while skin refers to the material used (Anggoro, 2018).

The term wayang comes from the word *ma hyang*, *wewayangan* or *wayang* which can be interpreted as a process towards a spiritual spirit, god or the Almighty. The word wayang is *ayang-ayang* which means a picture of a human shadow. Wayang in Malay means shadow. In the Bikol language, the word *baying* is known, meaning an object that can be seen in real terms. In the Acehnese language *bayeng*, Bugis language *wayang* or *bayang* (Janos & Rokhim, 2023).



Figure 2: Wayang Kulit
<https://1001indonesia.net/asset/2016/02/wayang-kulit.jpg>

Wayang kulit is made from buffalo skin, believed to be the embryo of various types of wayang that exist today. It is played by a puppeteer; accompanied by gamelan music played by a group of *nayaga* (gamelan players) and songs sung by *pesinden*. Each part of the wayang kulit performance has a strong philosophical symbol and meaning. Moreover, in terms of content, the wayang story always teaches noble character, loving and respecting each other, while sometimes interspersing social criticism and humorous roles through *goro-goro* scenes (El-Jaquene, 2019).

Watching wayang kulit at a performance, is not only watching the performance of a puppeteer who plays a wayang kulit character, listening to the puppeteer telling a story, enjoying the rhythm of the Gamelan music and the voices of several *pesinden* singing Javanese *gending* in high-pitched voices. Watching wayang is truly enjoying the storyline and appreciating the various life values contained in the messages of the puppeteer when he started to be a puppeteer.

Wayang kulit has a classic story whose characters have hardly changed since the beginning, because it is based on 2 great classic stories, namely the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* books, which are performed through leather puppets moved by behind the screen (Wiwid, 2022).

However, the uniqueness of wayang kulit is the harmonious blend of visual and auditory elements in the performance,

where music and theater play equally important roles. Gamelan music is not just an accompaniment, but also expresses mood, highlights characters, and helps the audience understand the narrative of the story. Wayang Kulit theater art, on the other hand, includes shadow visualization and also animation with the puppeteer acting as narrator and actor for various characters. This article describes how the relationship between music and theater contributes to the creation of the essence of wayang kulit as a unified performing art.

Nowadays, the use of wayang characters is often used as a means of reflection and role model for society, this is often displayed in the Solopos newspaper. As a form of traditional art, it is a local product and is always interesting in local media such as television, people from outside have considered that considering wayang as a social status, so people from outside Java have considered wayang as a superior culture and have high philosophical values.

Wayang in Javanese cultural values has various types and patterns, one of which is wayang purwa and the existence of various contemporary modifications and makes wayang much more interesting and wayang is used as a reality of Javanese culture that is rich in noble life philosophies so that the media situation is packaged in various formats that can be sold or have a certain appeal. The art of wayang karawitan in the wayang stage is a blend of vocal art and musical art. The combination of vocal art and musical art becomes identical. The art of karawitan is shown by how complex the niyaga (gamelan players) accompany the story with a harmonious musical composition, while the literary art is depicted through the puppeteer who creates the narrative of the wayang story, acting according to the character of each wayang (Anggoro, 2018). The combination of all of them can create a wayang kulit performance that can be enjoyed by various groups today with beautiful, intricate and complex art. In the

current era of wayang performances, music media is used, including classical and modern music:

Classical music

Classical music consists of a set of gamelan consisting of two scales, namely the pelog scale and the slendro scale (Nugroho, 2003). Gamelan music usually consists of saron, demung, kenong, gong, rebab, kendang, gender, gambang, and demung. Uniquely, gamelan is a versatile traditional musical instrument. Gamelan is a simple instrument that can be used to accompany gendhing-gendhing or any song.

Modern Music

Today's wayang performances are not only supported by classical music in the form of a set of gamelan. Along with the development of the times, performances are often equipped with modern electric musical instruments such as keyboards. The keyboard is used to add to the performance, for example sound effects in certain scenes, wind sounds, animal sounds and others. Culture in a certain sense is the result of human creations that can be enjoyed with the senses. (Namira, 2019).



Figure 3: Gamelan

<https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-vDDuhmzKBqY/TxhJizVSNLI/AAAAA AAAANA/09JCwTisRhY/s1600/pengerti an+gamelan.jpg>

Several previous studies have also discussed shadow puppets. For example,

research conducted by (Anwar, 2022) entitled "Musik Dalam Pertunjukan Wayang Pulau di Rumah Garuda Yogyakarta". Another study by (Prayoga, 2018) entitled "Peran Dalang Dalam Seni Pertunjukan Wayang Kulit".

This research is expected to contribute to enriching the study of Indonesian traditional arts, especially regarding the role of gamelan music and theater arts in shadow puppets. It is hoped that this research can be a reference for the development of traditional arts and strengthen the position of shadow puppets as an Indonesian cultural heritage. The benefit of this research is to provide deeper insight into the synergy between music and theater elements in creating shadow puppet performances as an effort to preserve shadow puppet arts and culture.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative research whose results come from data sources and data collection techniques. The data sources in this study come from secondary data sources, data that includes literature, journals, articles, and related documents that discuss the relationship between music and theater arts in wayang kulit. The data collection techniques used are literature studies, document/text studies and observations by observing wayang kulit performances on YouTube and other social media (Dinda, 2022).

Literature studies are conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the history, philosophy and development of wayang kulit and the role of gamelan music in the performance. While document or text studies are studies that focus on the analysis or interpretation of written materials based on their context, namely the relationship between music and theater arts in wayang kulit. The written materials used are articles and journals. To obtain high credibility, document researchers must be sure that the manuscripts are authentic. This type of research can also be used to explore someone's thoughts that

are contained in books or published manuscripts. The data collected is analyzed descriptively to understand the pattern of the relationship between music and theater arts in the context of wayang kulit.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The wayang kulit performance involves various elements of art, including fine art in the form of puppets carved in detail from leather, theater art through narration delivered by the puppeteer, and music art represented by gamelan. Music in wayang kulit functions to emphasize the atmosphere, accompany each scene, strengthen the emotions and moral messages to be conveyed, and also regulate the rhythm of the performance (Putro, 2018).

Gamelan consists of various traditional musical instruments played in groups, with each instrument playing a specific role in creating complementary rhythms and melodies (Sukotjo & Trilaksono, 2023). In the context of wayang kulit, gamelan music is used to provide an emotional nuance to each scene that is displayed. For example, fast tempos and high notes are used to depict battle or tension scenes, while softer and slower melodies are used for calmer or more contemplative scenes (Grimonia, 2023). In addition, the puppeteer often communicates directly with the gamelan players, giving signals to change the tempo or volume of the music according to the dynamics of the ongoing story. This creates a dynamic interaction between theater and music, where the two are closely related (Prabowo, 2020).

Wayang kulit as a theatrical art involves the puppeteer as the main actor who controls the puppets, as well as the narrator who explains the storyline to the audience. The puppeteer also plays an important role in regulating the interaction between music and visuals, using hand signals and voice to set the tempo of the music, and determining dramatic moments

supported by the rhythm of the gamelan. In a wayang kulit performance, visual and auditory elements interact with each other to create a unified harmony. The visual design of the wayang kulit itself is an intricate work of art, with carvings and coloring that reflect the characteristics of each character. When played behind the screen, the shadow puppets create an aesthetic visual pattern, which is accompanied by gamelan music to add depth to the performance experience (Ernawati & Astuti, 2024).

Auditory, gamelan music creates a deep emotional layer, emphasizing each important event in the story. The interaction between visuals and auditory in wayang kulit provides a unique multi-sensory experience for the audience, where these two elements work together to create a complete narrative.

The results of this study indicate that gamelan music in wayang kulit has an irreplaceable role in wayang kulit performances. Gamelan music not only strengthens the narrative, but also helps create an emotional atmosphere that suits each scene in the wayang kulit performance. The interaction between the puppeteer and the gamelan musicians looks very harmonious, where the puppeteer actively directs the musicians to adjust the tempo and volume of the music according to the development of the story in the wayang kulit being performed. Without gamelan music, wayang kulit performances lose most of their dramatic nuances.

Gamelan music provides an additional dimension that enriches the audience's experience, helping them better understand and feel the emotions displayed by the puppeteer (Warokka, 2023). In addition, the relationship between these visual and auditory elements creates a deep aesthetic experience, where the two elements complement and support each

other.

CONCLUSION

Wayang kulit is an Indonesian cultural heritage that is identical to the traditional culture of the Javanese people. Where wayang kulit is a form of traditional performing arts that combines visual and auditory elements harmoniously. Gamelan music plays an important role in strengthening the narrative in wayang kulit, creating an atmosphere, and emphasizing the emotions that arise in the wayang kulit story. The relationship between music and theater in wayang kulit is very close (Prabowo, 2020). In a wayang kulit performance, visual and auditory elements interact with each other to create a unified harmony. The visual design of the wayang kulit itself is a complex work of art, with carvings and coloring that reflect the characteristics of each character. When played behind the screen, the shadow puppets create an aesthetic visual pattern, accompanied by gamelan music to add depth to the performance experience (Ernawati & Astuti, 2024). Auditory, gamelan music creates a deep emotional layer, emphasizing every important event in the story. The interaction between visual and auditory in wayang kulit provides a unique multi-sensory experience for the audience, where these two elements work together to create a complete narrative. Where these two elements work together to create a profound and engaging shadow puppet show.

The analysis of this research can conclude that wayang kulit is not only a form of theatrical art, but also a manifestation of synergy between various different art elements, creating a complex, interesting and meaningful performance unity.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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