

# Nada Nusantara: Transcending Cultural Boundaries Through Transcultural Music Compositions

## Nada Nusantara: Transcendendo Fronteiras Culturais por meio de Composições Musicais Transculturais



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**Abstract:** Nada Nusantara is a collective of composers and musicians dedicated to exploring the musical heritage of the Nusantara (Malay Archipelago) and fusing it with classical Western

traditions. Through original transcultural compositions, the group seeks to blend diverse musical forms, melodies, rhythms, and instruments from these traditions, creating a soundscape that intertwines emotional depth with physical expression. Their music fosters meaningful cultural connections and redefines contemporary practices by bridging oral and notated traditions. This study analyzes two representative works—*Cermin Edina* by Marzelan Salleh and *Menambat Rakit* by Camellia Razali—to examine Nada Nusantara's approach to transcultural composition. *Cermin Edina* reflects a rich interweaving of gamelan-inspired rhythmic patterns with Western harmonic language, employing cyclical structures, vocal ornamentation, and modal shifts that evoke a meditative yet theatrical atmosphere. In contrast, *Menambat Rakit* draws on the timbral qualities of traditional Malay music and integrates them with Western harmonic textures, producing a contemplative narrative through layered textures and dynamic contrasts. These analyses highlight how the composers thoughtfully incorporate elements from both cultures, resulting in works that are structurally and expressively transcultural. Nada Nusantara plays a vital role in promoting cultural sustainability and diversity through international collaborations and artistic innovation. Their compositions demonstrate the universality of music and its power to transcend cultural boundaries. By spotlighting the artistic and aesthetic values of Nusantara culture, Nada Nusantara advances transcultural music as a contemporary art form, embracing openness, creativity, and the limitless possibilities of cultural fusion in today's global musical landscape.

**Keywords:** Contemporary music. Music composition. Nusantara. Nada Nusantara. Transcultural music.

**Resumo:** Nada Nusantara é um coletivo de compositores e músicos dedicados a explorar a herança musical de Nusantara (Arquipélago Malaio) e fundi-la com as tradições clássicas ocidentais. Através de composições transculturais originais, o grupo procura misturar diversas formas musicais, melodias, ritmos e instrumentos

destas tradições, criando uma paisagem sonora que entrelaça profundidade emocional com expressão física. A sua música promove conexões culturais significativas e redefine as práticas contemporâneas, unindo tradições orais e notadas. Este estudo analisa duas obras representativas – Cermin Edina de Marzelan Salleh e Menambat Rakit de Camellia Razali – para examinar a abordagem de Nada Nusantara à composição transcultural. Cermin Edina reflete um rico entrelaçamento de padrões rítmicos inspirados no gamelão com a linguagem harmônica ocidental, empregando estruturas cílicas, ornamentação vocal e mudanças modais que evocam uma atmosfera meditativa, porém teatral. Em contraste, Menambat Rakit baseia-se nas qualidades tímbricas da música tradicional malaia e integra-as com texturas harmónicas ocidentais, produzindo uma narrativa contemplativa através de texturas em camadas e contrastes dinâmicos. Estas análises destacam como os compositores incorporam cuidadosamente elementos de ambas as culturas, resultando em obras que são estrutural e expressivamente transculturais. Nada Nusantara desempenha um papel vital na promoção da sustentabilidade e da diversidade cultural através de colaborações internacionais e inovação artística. As suas composições demonstram a universalidade da música e o seu poder de transcender fronteiras culturais. Ao destacar os valores artísticos e estéticos da cultura Nusantara, Nada Nusantara promove a música transcultural como uma forma de arte contemporânea, abraçando a abertura, a criatividade e as possibilidades ilimitadas de fusão cultural na paisagem musical global de hoje.

**Palavras-chave:** Música contemporânea. Composição musical. Nusantara. Nada Nusantara. Música transcultural.

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## 1. Introduction

### The Concept of Intercultural

The concept of interculturality has long been present in human interactions, shaping cultural expressions through exchanges between different communities. In its broadest sense, interculturality refers to the integration of two or more distinct cultures, where elements from each tradition interact, merge, and evolve (Yan et al., 2021). Although the term *intercultural music* lacks a precise historical origin, the phenomenon itself has been evident since the early twentieth century, as globalization and cross-cultural influences have become more prominent. Intercultural music composition occurs when a composer integrates traditional elements from their own ethnic or social background with influences from other cultural traditions, creating a fusion of musical identities (Hijleh, 2018). This process allows for the preservation, reinvention, and expansion of traditional music while fostering dialogue between diverse artistic practices. By engaging with intercultural composition, musicians navigate complex relationships between heritage, innovation, and authenticity, often challenging rigid distinctions between “traditional” and “modern” music. Intercultural music not only serves as a medium for artistic exploration but also plays a crucial role in the internationalization of local traditions, ensuring their continued relevance in contemporary musical landscapes (Varriale, 2016). As societies become increasingly interconnected, intercultural music serves as a bridge, facilitating mutual understanding, appreciation, and collaboration among diverse cultures. The continuous evolution of this field highlights the dynamic nature of cultural identity and artistic expression, demonstrating how music serves as a powerful tool for global connectivity.

## What is Nada Nusantara?

Nada Nusantara is a collective of composers and musicians dedicated to exploring the soundscapes of traditional instruments from the Nusantara, also known as the Malay Archipelago. Their work aims to blend the region's rich musical heritage with elements of Western classical tradition, creating a unique, innovative intercultural sound. The ensemble's compositions are deeply rooted in both traditional and contemporary practices, resulting in a fusion of musical identities that reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of Nusantara music.

The music produced by Nada Nusantara seeks to integrate and harmonize the melodic patterns, rhythmic structures, and musical forms of these two distinct traditions. Through this synthesis, the ensemble aims to present new and original intercultural compositions that honor tradition while embracing modernity. Their performances incorporate various layers of sound and different modes of musical expression, offering audiences an immersive intercultural experience. This approach not only preserves the cultural essence of Nusantara music but also provides a platform for experimentation and artistic growth.

One of Nada Nusantara's key objectives is to facilitate cross-cultural collaboration. By engaging in intercultural mediation, the ensemble hopes to develop and refine a musical context that bridges traditional and modern influences. This ongoing process involves careful examination of musical structures, instrumentation, and stylistic elements, allowing for the creation of compositions that reflect both heritage and innovation. Through such efforts, Nada Nusantara contributes to the broader discourse on cultural sustainability and musical globalism.

## The Role of Nada Nusantara

The role of Nada Nusantara extends beyond mere performance; it serves as a medium for cultural expression, preservation, and reinvention. This paper explores how Nada Nusantara integrates

traditional Malay music, literature, and performance arts into its contemporary compositions. By combining Eastern and Western musical instruments, the ensemble creates a sound that transcends cultural boundaries while maintaining the essence of Nusantara traditions.

One of the central aspects of their work is the study and incorporation of traditional Malay musical nuances into new compositions. This involves analyzing how traditional melodies, rhythms, and structures can be adapted to suit modern artistic interpretations. The composers of Nada Nusantara carefully weave these elements into their works, ensuring that the music retains its cultural significance while appealing to contemporary audiences.

Through this process, the ensemble plays a crucial role in the internationalization of Malay Nusantara music. By adapting traditional musical forms to a modern context, Nada Nusantara helps to promote the region's musical heritage on a global scale. Their work not only introduces audiences worldwide to the beauty of Nusantara music but also demonstrates the adaptability and versatility of traditional musical expressions in an evolving cultural landscape. This international engagement contributes to the sustainability of Nusantara music, ensuring its continued relevance and appreciation beyond its geographical origins.

## The Role of Nada Nusantara Composers

The composers of Nada Nusantara play a significant role in shaping the ensemble's artistic direction. Their primary responsibility is to define and develop the intercultural experience intended for audiences, ensuring that the compositions effectively convey the fusion of different musical traditions. This requires a deep understanding of both Nusantara and Western classical music, as well as a sensitivity to the cultural and artistic contexts in which the music is created and performed.

Composers begin their creative process with a musical idea, which they gradually develop into a fully realized composition. This development is guided by the principles of intercultural music composition, where elements from different traditions are carefully integrated. The composers must strike a balance between innovation and tradition, ensuring that the final work reflects both authenticity and creativity.

Additionally, the composers of Nada Nusantara consider the overall performance context when developing their works. This involves considering factors such as instrumentation, staging, and audience engagement. By doing so, they create performances that are not only musically rich but also immersive and meaningful. Their compositions are designed to resonate with diverse audiences, fostering a deeper appreciation for the complexities and beauty of intercultural music.

Beyond composition, the composers also play a role in music education and cultural advocacy. By sharing their knowledge and experiences, they contribute to the broader discourse on intercultural music and its significance in today's world. Their work helps to inspire future generations of musicians and composers, encouraging them to explore the possibilities of cultural fusion in their own artistic endeavors.

## Background and Musical Influences of Composers: Camellia Razali and Marzelan Salleh

Music is not created in isolation; experiences, environment, and cultural heritage shape it. As composers, our journey in music has been deeply influenced by the traditions we grew up with, the cultures we have encountered, and the artistic exploration that continues to evolve throughout our lives (Salleh, 2018). The interplay between past and present, local and global, and tradition and innovation defines our approach to music composition.

For both Camellia Razali and Marzelan Salleh, music is not merely a form of artistic expression but also a reflection of personal

and cultural identities. Their compositions fuse traditional Malaysian and Asian musical elements with contemporary and international influences. This synthesis, often referred to as *intercultural music*, has become a defining characteristic of their works.

The multicultural environment in Malaysia, combined with years of exposure to diverse musical traditions abroad, has shaped their perspectives as composers. They view music as a dynamic and evolving art form in which cultural boundaries blur and new possibilities emerge through creative synthesis. This paper provides an in-depth discussion of their musical backgrounds, the influences that have shaped their work, and the principles that guide their compositional approach.

## Musical Background and Early Influences

Their musical identities have been profoundly shaped by Malaysia's cultural diversity, a country known for its rich blend of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous traditions. Growing up in this multicultural environment, Camellia was exposed to a variety of musical styles, from traditional Malay *gamelan* music to Indian classical *ragas* and Western orchestral compositions. This exposure provided a broad foundation for her understanding of music and sparked an interest in exploring connections among musical traditions.

Beyond the local context, Marzelan's experiences abroad have also played a crucial role in shaping his musical development. Studying and living in foreign countries exposed him to new compositional techniques, different aesthetic values, and fresh ways of thinking about music. These experiences have enabled him to see his own cultural heritage from a different perspective, allowing him to reinterpret traditional elements in innovative ways.

One key aspect of both their musical philosophies is the belief that culture is not static; it evolves through interaction and exchange (Yan et al., 2021). The process of engaging in different musical traditions has led them to explore new soundscapes while maintaining a deep respect for the essence of their roots.

## Intercultural Music: A Defining Element in Compositions

Intercultural music is the integration of elements from multiple cultural traditions into a cohesive artistic expression (Yan et al., 2021). For Nada Nusantara composers such as Camellia Razali and Marzelan Salleh, this means blending traditional Malaysian and Asian musical elements with contemporary and international influences, not merely juxtaposing different musical styles but fostering a meaningful dialogue between them. This process involves key components, such as the assimilation of musical forms, in which international structures are integrated with traditional Malaysian elements to create compositions that honor tradition while embracing innovation. Exploration of timbre and instrumentation plays a crucial role, combining conventional instruments like the *gamelan*, *angklung*, and *seruling* with Western classical instruments such as the piano, violin, and cello to produce unique sonic textures that embody multiple cultural identities. Rhythmic and melodic fusion further enhances the compositions, as traditional rhythmic patterns and melodic contours are reinterpreted within contemporary harmonic frameworks, allowing past and present influences to coexist harmoniously. Underpinning this approach is a philosophy of balance, ensuring that traditional elements are not merely decorative but are integral to shaping the musical narrative. Through this thoughtful synthesis, Nada Nusantara's compositions become an exploration of identity, heritage, and modernity, serving as a bridge between cultures and inviting listeners into a world where traditions interact, evolve, and transcend rigid definitions.

## Living and Composing Abroad: The Evolution of Musical Language

Years of studying and living abroad have significantly impacted the compositional styles of both composers. Exposure to different artistic environments and engagement with international musicians and composers have broadened their perspectives on music-making. While being away from home, they have found themselves increasingly drawn to the sounds of Malaysia, incorporating traditional influences more consciously into their works.

The experience of living in a foreign country deepened my understanding of how cultural identity is expressed through music. Rather than viewing heritage as something fixed, it is, in fact, fluid and an adaptable source of inspiration. This realization has encouraged and, thus, developed into a musical language that is uniquely their own—one that reflects both their roots and their global experiences.

Several of their compositions written during their time abroad can be categorized as intercultural works. They feature strong Malaysian influences, whether in their melodic structures, instrumental timbres, or rhythmic patterns. Over time, this intercultural approach has become a defining characteristic of their music, allowing them to create compositions that resonate with both local and international audiences.

## 2. Marzelan Salleh - The Role of the Composer in an Intercultural Context

According to Marzelan Salleh, the role of a composer in an intercultural setting extends beyond merely writing music; it requires a deep engagement with cultural contexts, artistic traditions, and audience perception. A composer must possess a thorough understanding of the cultural origins of musical elements to ensure that they are used authentically and respectfully. This awareness helps preserve the essence of

traditional sounds while allowing for creative reinterpretation. At the same time, composers must navigate the delicate balance between honouring tradition and embracing innovation, ensuring that their work remains both rooted in heritage and relevant to contemporary audiences. Music is inherently communicative, and composers must consider how their creations resonate with listeners from diverse cultural backgrounds, making their work accessible and meaningful across different artistic landscapes (Salleh, 2018). Furthermore, collaboration plays a crucial role in the compositional process across cultures. By working with musicians from various traditions, Marzelan has explored new textures, techniques, and perspectives, resulting in a more dynamic and enriched creative output. Through this interplay of tradition and modernity, his music contributes to the evolving landscape of intercultural music, fostering cross-cultural appreciation and expanding the possibilities of artistic expression.

## *Cermin Edina - Marzelan Salleh*

### Rhythm and Metric Structure

In *Cermin Edina*, Marzelan Salleh explores the intricate relationship between rhythm, text, and musical phrasing. Like music, language inherently possesses a rhythmic quality that influences the overall structure and movement of a composition (Vereshchahina-Biliavska et al., 2023). The metric structure of the text, composed initially by the composer himself, demonstrates a deliberate organization of syllabic patterns, allowing for a rhythmic framework that is both flexible and expressive. In literature, metric structure determines the flow of words, and similarly, in music, rhythm dictates forward motion and phrasing.

Marzelan employs rhythmic contrast to create tension and release throughout the piece. For instance, at bar 36, following a piano interlude, the rhythmic motif in the vocal melody shifts to shorter note values, with repeated dotted rhythms accented by triplets. This shift in rhythmic structure marks a crucial moment

in the piece, increasing tension and conflict. The contrast between the earlier sections and this gestural change is carefully constructed, ensuring a dynamic progression that enhances the expressive depth of the composition. As Figure 1 shows, the rhythmic quality of words and language varies, as sentences can exhibit either regular or irregular rhythmic patterns.

Fig. 1: Rhythm in words

The image shows a musical score for 'Cermin Edina' in 3/4 time. The vocal part (S.) and piano part (Pno.) are shown on separate staves. The vocal part includes lyrics in Indonesian. The piano part provides harmonic support. The score is divided into measures 4, 39, 42, 45, 48, and 50. Measure 4 starts with a dynamic of  $\text{mf}$  and a tempo of  $\text{=72}$ . The vocal line includes the lyrics 'Kau de-nge-r de-nge-r kan-lah ji-wa i - ni me-mang gli mang gli cer-min mu'. Measure 39 follows with a dynamic of  $\text{f}$ . Measure 42 starts with a dynamic of  $\text{f}$ . Measure 45 starts with a dynamic of  $\text{f}$ . Measure 48 starts with a dynamic of  $\text{f}$ . Measure 50 starts with a dynamic of  $\text{ff}$ . The piano part features various dynamics and rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth-note patterns. Measure numbers 4, 39, 42, 45, 48, and 50 are indicated above the staves.

Source: Author

### Form and Text-Music Integration

One of the key compositional challenges in *Cermin Edina* lies in maintaining a balance between music and text. Salleh ensures that the text interlaces seamlessly with the music, preserving its natural rhythmic flow and linguistic integrity. The compositional approach prioritizes the study of linguistic phrasing—analyzing words, phrases, and sentences to determine their inherent

rhythmic patterns (Salleh & Chang, 2025). This method allows for a natural alignment between text and musical phrasing, resulting in a cohesive and expressive musical setting.

Moreover, the text's division into phrases and lines is guided by semantic considerations. Marzelan does not impose a rigid musical structure onto the text; instead, he allows the natural cadence of the words to dictate musical phrasing and cadential points. This approach ensures that the text retains its literary essence while becoming an integral component of musical form.

Additionally, the role of language in composition is significant. Different languages possess distinct rhythmic patterns, accents, and tonal inflections that shape the overall musical style. The Malay language, with its open vowels and strong consonants, naturally lends a lyrical quality that enhances vocal expressivity (Razali & Salleh, 2019). Marzelan leverages these linguistic characteristics to shape the melodic and rhythmic flow of *Cermin Edina*, ensuring that the music remains deeply connected to the textual material. As Figure 2 shows, the balance between music and text is shaped by the pattern and pace of words, which determine cadential points in the composition. Since different languages have unique rhythmic and tonal characteristics, they naturally lead to distinct musical outcomes.

Fig. 2: Predisposition of text

**CERMIN EDINA- text by Marzelan Salleh**

Dengar-dengarkanlah  
 Oh kau sampaikanlah  
 Angin bawakanlah  
 Khabarkan rasa ini untuknya oh...

Tuhan tolonglah ku  
 Oh kau sampaikanlah  
 Doaku yang ikhlas  
 Untuk dia cerminmu ku pinta

Kau dengar-dengarkanlah jiwa ini  
 Memanggil-manggil cerminmu oh...

Kau dengar-dengarkanlah jiwa ini  
 Memanggil dia oh si dia

Cermin itu oh...  
 Berikan cermin itu  
 Berikan ku  
 Oh berikanku  
 Oh cermin itu...

Serahkanlah oh  
 Adindamu oh  
 Batinku merindu

Tuhan tolonglah ku  
 Oh kau sampaikanlah  
 Doaku yang ikhlas  
 Untuk dia cerminmu Edina

Source: Author

## Pitch and Melodic Materials

The melodic content of *Cermin Edina* is derived mainly from modal scales, a technique that reinforces its connection to traditional Malay music while allowing for contemporary harmonic exploration. Salleh employs melodic development through arpeggiated harmonies, which create a sense of fluidity and progression between the voice and piano accompaniment.

Malay musical influences are evident in the nuanced ornamentations that embellish the vocal lines. These embellishments, characteristic of traditional Malay melodies, are seamlessly integrated into the compositional fabric, enhancing expressivity without disrupting the modern harmonic language. The melody is not static; it undergoes continuous transformation, evolving through subtle modifications in pitch, contour, and rhythmic articulation.

Additionally, the interplay between the vocal line and the piano accompaniment is crucial in shaping the piece's expressive character. The melody often exhibits an airy quality, which is further developed through upward and downward movements. These directional gestures contribute to the piece's dramatic intensity, allowing moments of heightened emotional impact and resolution (Salleh & Razali, 2023). In Fig. 1, Malay semantics and text patterns shape the melody, which is then intertwined with ornamentations to enhance its expressiveness.

Fig. 3: Malay semantics and Malay text patterns shape the melody, intertwined with ornamentations

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The top system, starting at measure 51, is in 6/4 time and 64th note duration. It is labeled 'E' and 'A tempo'. The vocal part (S) has a melodic line with various slurs and grace notes. The piano part (Pno) provides harmonic support with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns. The lyrics 'tan to - long - lah - ku' are written below the vocal line. The bottom system, starting at measure 63, is in 6/4 time and 64th note duration. It is labeled 'F' and 'Distant and far away'. The vocal part continues with its melodic line and ornamentations. The piano part provides harmonic support. The lyrics 'lah do - a - ku yang luh - las un - tuk - di -' are written below the vocal line. The score is signed 'Dr M@71082' at the bottom of the first system.

The top system (measures 51-58) is in 6/4 time and 64th note duration, labeled 'E' and 'A tempo'. The vocal part (S) has a melodic line with various slurs and grace notes. The piano part (Pno) provides harmonic support with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns. The lyrics 'tan to - long - lah - ku' are written below the vocal line. The bottom system (measures 63-70) is in 6/4 time and 64th note duration, labeled 'F' and 'Distant and far away'. The vocal part continues with its melodic line and ornamentations. The piano part provides harmonic support. The lyrics 'lah do - a - ku yang luh - las un - tuk - di -' are written below the vocal line. The score is signed 'Dr M@71082' at the bottom of the first system.

Source: Author

## Harmonic Colours and Textures

Harmonic language in *Cermin Edina* is characterized by its complexity and textural richness. Marzelan employs diverse stylistic and technical devices to create an expressive and multidimensional soundscape. The harmonic texture is built upon layers of intervallic structures and transpositions of chordal formations, resulting in a sonically dense and colorful composition.

Timbre, or sound color, plays a crucial role in defining the expressive quality of the piece. Marzelan manipulates harmonic densities to evoke different emotional states, transitioning between moments of calm introspection and dramatic intensity. The piano accompaniment contributes significantly to this dynamic range, reinforcing the emotional nuances embedded within the vocal line.

The interaction between voice and accompaniment is highly interdependent. The vocal line is not merely placed atop the harmonic framework; instead, it actively engages with the underlying harmonic structure, creating a continuous dialogue between the two. This interrelationship enhances the composition's overall cohesiveness, ensuring that the music and text function as a unified artistic expression.

## Expressive Interpolations: Calmness and Outbursts

A defining feature of *Cermin Edina* is its oscillation between serenity and dramatic outbursts. This contrast is effectively conveyed through the vocal line, which remains predominantly calm and subdued, occasionally interrupted by moments of heightened intensity. Salleh utilizes the soprano voice's inherent qualities to embody these contrasting emotional states, enabling a dynamic interplay between restraint and expressivity.

The interpolations between tranquility and agitation are strategically placed throughout the composition, enhancing its structural and emotional impact. These mood shifts are further emphasized through the manipulation of musical parameters,

such as dynamics, articulation, and harmonic tension (Salleh & Razali, 2023). For example, sudden increases in vocal intensity, marked by more aggressive rhythmic gestures and harmonic dissonances, create moments of dramatic upheaval before resolving into softer, more lyrical passages.

This structural and expressive design mirrors the thematic essence of *Cermin Edina*, unfolding through cycles of tension and resolution. The balance between contrasting sections ensures a compelling listening experience, as the music continuously evolves without becoming predictable or static. Fig. 4 shows that the relationship between music and voice is essential in achieving ideal expression and sound colors, ensuring a harmonious blend of meaning and musicality.

Fig. 4: Colouristic Sound Expressions

3

**B** Desolate

24

S. a cer - min - mu ku pin - ta

Pno. *p* *pp* *pp*

36

**C** =72 With determination

S. Kau de-ngrar-de-ngrar-kan-lah ji-wa i - ni me-mang gi\_ mang - gi\_ cer-min - mu

Pno. *mf*

39

S. oh Kau de-ngrar-de-ngrar-kan-lah ji-wa i - ni me - mang gi\_

Pno. *mf*

42

S. di - a \_ oh si di - a Cer-min i - tu o \_ oh

Pno. *p* *mf* *mp*

Source: Author

## The Essence of Cermin Edina

*Cermin Edina* stands as a testament to Marzelan Salleh's ability to merge linguistic, cultural, and musical elements into a cohesive and expressive composition. The piece exemplifies a

deep understanding of the intricate relationship between text and music, ensuring that both elements contribute meaningfully to the overall artistic expression.

Through his meticulous approach to rhythm, melodic development, and harmonic texture, Marzelan crafts a work that is both rooted in tradition and forward-looking in its exploration of musical possibilities. The careful balance between calmness and dramatic intensity adds depth and dimension to the composition, making *Cermin Edina* a compelling example of contemporary intercultural music composition.

Ultimately, the essence of *Cermin Edina* lies in its seamless integration of voice and music, text and melody, tradition and innovation. Salleh's compositional approach serves as an exemplar for composers seeking to engage with intercultural influences while maintaining artistic integrity and emotional authenticity.

### 3. Camellia Razali - The Limitless Potential of Intercultural Composition

For Camellia Razali, intercultural music composition offers limitless creative potential by blending traditional musical elements from one's heritage with influences from foreign cultures. This fusion does not merely serve as a compromise between different traditions but instead expands artistic possibilities, enabling the creation of music rich in depth, complexity, and emotional resonance (Razali & Salleh, 2020). By drawing on multiple sources, Camellia breaks free of rigid categorizations of "traditional" and "modern," crafting innovative works that transcend conventional boundaries. She also finds this approach provides fresh perspectives on heritage, reinterpreting traditional music in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences while preserving its essence. Furthermore, as a music researcher herself, Camellia considers intercultural music as a powerful medium for cross-cultural dialogue, fostering appreciation and respect for diverse musical expressions. Through this dynamic exchange, Camellia

agrees that more composers can contribute to a global artistic landscape where traditions interact, evolve, and inspire new generations of musicians and listeners.

### ***Menambat Rakit – Camellia Razali***

#### **Integration of Text and Music**

The inseparability of text and music is a defining characteristic of *Menambat Rakit*. The text is not treated as an independent element but as an integral component of the musical composition. This synthesis is evident in the way melodic lines are shaped by the language's phonetic and rhythmic characteristics (Razali & Salleh, 2019). For instance, elongated vowel sounds may be reflected in sustained melodic phrases, while percussive consonants might be mirrored by sharp articulations in the instrumental accompaniment. Such detailed attention to linguistic expression ensures that the music and text exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship, where neither element overshadows the other.

#### **Textual Movement Within Music**

In the vocal passages of *Menambat Rakit*, the text's movement through music is meticulously crafted to maintain its clarity and expressiveness. The composer explores methods of integrating words into the musical fabric, allowing them to move fluidly within the harmonic and melodic structure. This approach prevents the text from becoming rigidly constrained by the music, instead enabling it to flow naturally within the composition (Figure 5). The result is a dynamic interplay between vocal lines and instrumental accompaniment, where the meaning of the words is heightened by the musical setting (Salleh & Chang, 2025).

Fig. 5: Expressive, lyrical dialogues

The musical score for 'Menambat Rakit' is a two-page spread. The top page features a title 'To Ang Mei Fong' and 'Menambat Rakit' for soprano and fortepiano, with a note that the text is from 'Menambat Rakit' by Dato' A. Samad Said. The composer is listed as Camellia Siti Maya Mohamed Razali. The score is in 4/4 time, with dynamic markings such as 'A Tenderly ♩ = 64' and 'B Calmly ♩ = 64'. The vocal line is for soprano, and the piano accompaniment is for fortepiano. The bottom page continues the score with measures 8 through 23, showing the vocal and piano parts in a 4/4 time signature. The vocal line includes lyrics in Indonesian: 'dah de-mi-ki-an... ia... ma di-cin-ta-... su-kar iah.', 'di-ku-pa-kan', and 'in - ti pe-nga-la-man...'. The piano part features various rhythmic patterns and dynamics like 'ppp', 'p', and 'mf'.

Source: Author

### Rhythmic Qualities of Text in Musical Structure

Text, much like music, possesses a distinct rhythmic quality (Vanden Bosch der Nederlanden et al., 2023). The natural inflection of speech, the rise and fall of phrases, and the pacing of words all contribute to the rhythmic foundation of a piece (Figure 6). In *Menambat Rakit*, the rhythmic patterns of the text guide the musical structure, dictating phrase lengths and determining cadential resolutions. This close relationship ensures that the music does not merely accompany the text but actively participates in its delivery. The balance between the textual rhythm and musical phrasing creates a seamless interplay, reinforcing the piece's expressive power.

Fig. 6: Rhythmic passage falling through mezzo-soprano, and piano

The musical score for 'Menambat Rakit' is presented in five staves, each corresponding to a page number (4, 5, 9, 10, 11) and a measure number (27, 36, 29, 39, 33). The vocal parts are for Soprano (Sopr.) and Piano (Pno). The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *pp*, and *mf espress.* The vocal parts feature lyrics in Indonesian, such as 'ke-pe-di-han', 'a-kar', 'ke-rin-du-an', 'ke-pang-ka-lan', 'ba-tin', 'ra-kit', 'di-tam-bat', 'kan', 'ba-ra', 'ke-na-nungan', 'ke-re-sa-han', 'di-ku-at-kan', and 'Me-mang-be-gi-tu', 'ba-nyak', 'di-per-lu-kan', 'ke-ku-a'. Measure 33 includes a tempo marking 'C Sorrowful  $\text{J} = 64$ '. The score is set in various time signatures, including 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4.

Source: Author

## Interplay Between Language and Melody

The relationship between music and text in the composition of *Menambat Rakit* is a fundamental aspect of its structure and expressive depth. The interplay between language and melody is not merely a matter of setting words to music but rather an intricate process of merging linguistic and musical elements into a cohesive artistic expression. The rhythmic qualities inherent in text shape the flow and phrasing of the music, influencing cadential points and melodic contours. In this composition, every syllable, phrase, and sentence is carefully examined to ensure that the music supports and enhances the meaning embedded in the words.

## The Process of Engaging with Text in Composition

An essential aspect of this composition process is the deep engagement with the text itself. Composing music with text requires a thorough understanding of its nuances, which involves

repeatedly speaking, reciting, and analyzing the words. This practice allows the composer to internalize the text's rhythmic structure, ensuring that the musical setting remains faithful to its essence. Speaking the text aloud helps identify natural emphases and cadences, which are then translated into musical gestures that enhance the piece's narrative and emotional impact (Figure 7).

Fig. 7: Mezzo-soprano in triplet quaver rhythms in climax Rehearsal mark E

The musical score consists of two staves: Soprano (Mezzo-soprano) and Piano. The score is divided into four sections: D, E, F, and G. Section D (measures 45-48) is labeled 'Peacefully' with a tempo of 54-60. Section E (measures 54-57) is labeled 'Risoluto' with a tempo of 64. Section F (measures 49-52) is labeled 'dolcissimo' with a tempo of 54-60. Section G (measures 58-61) is labeled 'Risoluto' with a tempo of 64. The lyrics are: 'AK-hir-nya tak ter-du-ga ke-ku a - tan mem-bu-ak sen-di-ri-' in section E; 'o - oh dan di - se - da - ri se - mu - a' in section F; and 'tak - kan sam-pai ke da-sar in - ti a - ha' in section G. The piano part features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note chords, throughout the score.

Source: Author

## Harmonic Development Influenced by Text

Furthermore, the composition considers how text can influence harmonic development. In *Menambat Rakit*, harmonic progressions often reflect the emotional weight of the lyrics, creating an additional layer of meaning. Dissonances may be employed to underscore moments of tension or longing within the text, while resolution points align with textual climaxes, reinforcing the expressive arc of the piece. This harmonic sensitivity ensures that the music does not function merely as a decorative element but as an active participant in conveying the deeper themes embedded in the lyrics.

## Melodic Construction and Textual Considerations

Textual considerations similarly inform melodic construction in Menambat Rakit. The composer carefully selects pitch contours that enhance the expressive qualities of the words. The melodic material is shaped to accommodate the language's natural intonation patterns, preserving its speech-like qualities while allowing for musical expressivity (Figure 8). This method yields a vocal line that is both lyrical and textually communicative, ensuring the text's meaning remains central to the listener's experience.

Fig. 8: Contemplative, almost still atmosphere

Source: Author

## Semantic Structuring and Rhythmic Influence on Musical Form

Semantically structured phrasing plays a crucial role in shaping musical development (Razali & Salleh, 2019). The division of lines and phrases in *Menambat Rakit* follows the text's natural syntax, allowing for a more organic musical flow (Figure 9). Rather than imposing an arbitrary musical framework onto the words, the composition process involves studying and internalizing the linguistic patterns, ensuring that the music mirrors the natural rhythm and stress of the language. This approach results in a more authentic and expressive vocal delivery, in which the text's meaning is fully realized through musical interpretation.

The role of rhythm in text setting extends beyond individual syllables to larger structural elements. The pacing of phrases and the placement of pauses within the music reflect the rhetorical flow of the text. These decisions contribute to the overall form of *Menambat Rakit*, where musical sections are delineated not only by harmonic and thematic development but also by textual divisions (Razali & Salleh, 2019). This alignment between textual and musical structures reinforces the composition's unity, creating a cohesive narrative that unfolds seamlessly across both media.

Fig.9: *Menambat Rakit* by A. Samad Said, English translation by the author

Transliterated Bahasa Melayu text	Word-by-word English translation
Sesudah demikian lama dicintai, sukarlah dilupakan.	After being loved for so long, it is difficult to forget,
Inti pengalaman, kepedihan; akar kerinduan keresahan...	The experience, pain, roots of longing, despair..
Memang begitu banyak diperlukan kekuatan, kepangkalan batin, rakit ditambatkan bara kenangan dikuatkan	Courage is needed in so many places back to the soul, the raft is tied onto the embers of memories grows stronger
Akhirnya, tak terduga, kekuatan membuak sendiri, dan disedari, semua takkan sampai, ke dasar inti.	Finally, unexpectedly, courage floods over again, upon realizing, all shall not reach, the depths of meaning.
Tiada lagilah bezanya, sama ada hilangnya kemudian atau tenggelamnya sekarang.	There is no difference perhaps, If it is lost later or it sinks now.
Tiada juga bezanya , jika ia langsung tak datang atau tiba-tiba terkorban	There is no difference either, If it never comes or perishes suddenly
Kepiluan yang berlanjut akhirnya, ditenterami keyakinan, betapa dielak pun takdir tetap terbuka pintunya bertanya: manusia, engkau ini sebenar-benarnya siapa...	Desolation that continues, finally, consoled by confidence, however we avoid fate the doors will always open asking: o, humans, who are you truly...

Source: Author

## A Unified Artistic Vision

The music composition of *Menambat Rakit* exemplifies the profound relationship between text and music. By treating language as a fundamental musical element, the composer ensures that the vocal lines and instrumental accompaniment work in harmony to deliver a deeply expressive and meaningful experience. The rhythmic and semantic qualities of the text shape the music's form, phrasing, and harmonic language, resulting

in a composition where words and melody are inseparable. Through meticulous attention to linguistic nuances and musical expressivity, *Menambat Rakit* stands as a testament to the power of integrating text and music into a unified artistic vision.

## 4. Conclusion

Nada Nusantara represents a significant initiative in the field of intercultural music, advancing a unique musical language that blends traditional Nusantara sounds with Western classical influences. Through original compositions and performances, the ensemble bridges cultures and traditions, creating music that is emotionally resonant and culturally expansive. Their work highlights the importance of cultural sustainability by demonstrating how traditional forms can evolve and thrive in contemporary contexts, while also preserving and reintroducing the rich musical heritage of the Malay Archipelago to global audiences.

As composers, the creative journey has been shaped by a tapestry of cultural influences—both local and global, past and present. Through Nada Nusantara, both composers contribute to a larger dialogue surrounding cultural exchange, artistic hybridity, and the evolving nature of musical traditions. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to engage with multiple musical languages is an essential skill for future composers seeking to create meaningful, relevant art. Nada Nusantara's commitment to intercultural composition reflects a broader vision of music as a living, evolving art form—one that thrives through diversity, dialogue, and innovation.

Two representative works, *Cermin Edina* by Marzelan Salleh and *Menambat Rakit* by Camellia Razali, exemplify Nada Nusantara's vision. *Menambat Rakit* treats language as a foundational musical element, allowing the text's rhythmic and semantic qualities to shape the musical structure, phrasing, and harmonic language. The result is a deeply expressive and cohesive integration of

voice and accompaniment. Likewise, *Cermin Edina* demonstrates Salleh's skill in merging linguistic, cultural, and musical elements into an emotionally compelling composition. Its balance of calmness and dramatic intensity, tradition and innovation serves as a powerful model of contemporary intercultural music-making.

The recent support from the UM Global Transformation Research Grant (UMGTRG) has opened new international platforms for promoting Malay art songs and expanding the reach of Nada Nusantara's vision. Through its continued exploration of innovative compositional approaches, Nada Nusantara upholds music as a universal medium that simultaneously preserves cultural heritage, advances the frontiers of artistic expression, and facilitates intercultural dialogue.

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