

# **A Musical Hierarchy Reordered: Dangdut and the Rise of a Popular Music**

**Ceres E. Pioquinto**

## **Introduction**

Observers of contemporary Indonesian cultural landscape have always noted not only the richness and variety of musical experiences but also their overwhelming omnipresence (Hatch 1989; Pemberton 1987). Of these present-day musical experiences, perhaps the most ubiquitous in influence and the most pervasive in effect is dangdut music. This current pre-eminent state of dangdut is both attributed to and evidenced by its nationwide appeal across a wide spectrum of socio-economic classes and ethno-linguistic groups.

Yet, dangdut's own development as Indonesia's most popular modern music genre did not always follow a smooth, even, or quick transition from being a low-class, marginal music to the position where it is today. In his opening speech at the *First National Competition for Best Dangdut Composition* in 1991, Indonesia's dangdut superstar, Rhoma Irama, sums up in so many words the rather colorful history of dangdut music:

Twenty years ago, dangdut could not perform in buildings. It only played on the edges of urban kampungs, and enjoyed by those who wore sarung. Before, the singers privileged to ride in cars were only those in the pop music stream. A dangdut singer, although a top singer, could only take the opelet [small urban bus]. Before, those who could afford to buy houses were only the pop singers. Dangdut singers could only afford to rent places at kampung. Before, dangdut singers could only sing at wedding receptions and circumcision ceremonies. Now, dangdut singers can also ride in cars, buy a house, and perform at Balai Sidang.<sup>1)</sup>

This paper will try to trace the processes of change involved in the transformation of dangdut as a lower-class, marginal music into one of Indonesia's most popular new urban music genres. To do that, I will focus on two complementary problem areas: on the one hand, what such changes may reveal about the dynamics and processes of musical development and how they influence human behavior in particular, and society in general; and on the other hand, the part musical expressions such as dangdut play in social reorganizations. Such an approach requires at the outset locating dangdut within a historical context, a task that is admittedly formidable for several reasons, foremost of which is the paucity of authoritative materials on the subject.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to understand dangdut without knowing its historical and musical roots, and the social and cultural context that framed its development during the last twenty years. Within this historical perspective, I will try to examine the complex set of processes underlying dangdut's move from a subordinate status to become an important part of the mainstream culture. These processes were not only complex, but were also fraught with contradictions for dangdut's entry into the dominant culture was marked by a struggle with other competing musical genres over form, meaning, and market.

To facilitate what is undoubtedly a difficult task of reconstructing dangdut's musical history and establish a framework for its consideration, I will begin by examining the first ten years of dangdut's development covering the period from the early 1970s to about 1982 and then move on to the second period from 1982 to the present. The basis for this temporal boundary is the publication in 1982 of William Frederick's article, "Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Music".<sup>2)</sup> To date the only comprehensive work on the subject, Frederick's article provides an illuminating account of the largely unexplored beginnings of dangdut music during the first ten years of its development. As an invaluable source of information for the understanding of dangdut's origins, its early years, and the social and cultural context that bred it, this article serves as a point of reference for my examination of the first period.

There is another reason, however, for using Frederick's article as a temporal boundary and that is its impact and continuing influence on the development of dangdut during the second period. This article has played a vital role in changing the image of dangdut and opened the way for the music's acceptance by a wider Indonesian public. Unfortunately, ten years since Frederick published his seminal work on dangdut, this remains up to the present the only account on this music; ten years since he lamented the lack of scholarly interest on the subject, the situation has shown no signs of improving and, as before, many among the Indonesian intellectuals continue to look on dangdut not only as faddish,<sup>3)</sup> low class and commercialized, but also as disreputable.<sup>4)</sup> As a result, the last ten years of dangdut's development remains unaccounted for from a more scholarly perspective.

### **Historical Framework: 1970–1982**

In the beginning, the word dangdut did not refer to a distinct musical form but was a term used to describe in a disparaging sense the musical style of a type of acculturated music known as *irama melayu* (lit. Melayu rhythm) or *Melayu Deli* songs.<sup>5)</sup> Though *irama melayu* originated in Sumatra and was played by the orchestral ensemble called *orkes melayu*, it became popular in the *kampungs* and backstreets of Jakarta sometime in the 1940s. In time, the labels *irama melayu* and *orkes melayu* have been used interchangeably to refer to the same kind of music.<sup>6)</sup>

The musical strands of *irama melayu*, however, go back into the past and were associated with a variety of syncretic musical forms that have been flourishing in the

country for generations. Musicians and music critics do not always concur as far as the exact origins of this music are concerned and variously ascribe some of its contemporary musical characteristics to the influence of, among others, a combination of two types of urban music known as *kroncong*<sup>7)</sup> and *tanjidor*<sup>8)</sup> which were popular during the colonial period.

As early as the 1930s, political, social and economic changes in Indonesia set the stage for the development of a wide variety of new genres of Indonesian music. In particular, the growing sense of nationalism prompted the search for cultural forms that could best express nationalist sentiments and at the same time appeal to a mass audience. According to Frederick, *kroncong* melodies best approximated the criteria sought by nationalists at that time. (Frederick 1982: 106). From here on, *kroncong* musicians started experimenting with new sounds and new Westernized instrumentations, blending these with the original *kroncong* harmonies to produce modernized versions. While this modernized version remained popular for a while, it did not sit well with the authorities of the Sukarno era who perceived it as rather bourgeois and foreign. As a result, a new search for a music more indigenous and more dynamic in both rhythm and melody began and, according to Frederick, musicians found this in *irama melayu*.

Political reasons were thus largely responsible for pulling *irama melayu* out of the obscurity and disreputable surroundings of backstreets, prostitution districts, and urban *kampung*s. Up to the early 60s, *orkes melayu* had a wide following among the urban lower-class and was the favored form of entertainment for *kampung* community feasts such as circumcision ceremonies and wedding celebrations. However, it began to attract a wider popularity when it was used as musical track for a number of films, notably *Djuwita* and *Serodja*, which became box-office hits.<sup>9)</sup>

The central musical style of *irama melayu* drew from the combination of *kroncong* stylistic attributes, and its own rhythmic flourish and vocal technique derived from Arabian secular dance music. The Arabic elements have been attributed by some observers to the influence of *orkes gambus* (lit. lute) which was first introduced in Jakarta in 1918 by an Arab named Mubarak, who entered Indonesia by way of Malacca (Sylado 1990). According to Sylado's account, Mubarak became famous for his *orkes gambus*, *Al Kalifah*, which was then the favorite dance orchestra for early Chinese-Betawi 'ballroom' dancing.<sup>10)</sup>

Sylado contends that *orkes gambus*, contrary to some perception based mainly on its Arabic, hence Islamic, roots, was not a musical medium for religious teaching, but rather, owing to its function as a dance music, was a secular (*duniawi*, lit. worldly) musical genre whose lyrical and rhythmic modes were characterized by sensuality.<sup>11)</sup> Eventually, some of the *orkes gambus* stylistic elements, notably the melodies and the instrumentations, became melded in the *irama melayu* form and have remained dominant in many dangdut compositions in the present time.

The two aspects of *orkes gambus* (its use as dance music, and its sensual lyrics and rhythmic moments) may explain the element of sensuality that has seeped into *irama*

*melayu* and ultimately found its way into dangdut. Their residual traces color much of dangdut's musical characteristics and performance style. Beginning in the 1950s, influences from Indian film music which inundated Indonesian cinema at that time became incorporated in the existing *orkes melayu* style, introducing the distinctive percussive patterns which produced the dominant sounds *dang* and *dut* on a drum, known locally as *gendang*.<sup>12)</sup> The combination of the distinctive Malay-Arabic singing style, and the *orkes gambus*, *orkes melayu* and Indian instrumental ensemble such as the lute (*gambus*), bass, mandolin, tambourine, harmonium, acoustic guitar, and bamboo flute (*suling*) would later produce the *irama melayu* songs whose dominant percussion patterns inspired the use of the epithet, dangdut.

About this time saw the gradual rise of *irama melayu* musicians who also doubled up as film actors, and the growth of *orkes melayu* bands. One of the earliest and most important of these was *orkes melayu Chandralela* whose band leader, Husein Bawafie, wrote in 1956 the lyrics to "Boneka Dari India." Both its musical arrangement and its musical rendition by the then up-and-coming *orkes melayu* singer, Ellya Khadam, made this song the precursor of dangdut music, long before the term itself was invented. Apart from this trailblazing composition, Husein Bawafie and his *orkes melayu Chandralela* are credited for honing and launching the careers of the first crop of singers — oldtimers such as Munif Bahasuan, Ellya Khadam, Hashim Khan, Johanah Satar, and Elvy Sukaiseh — who would later constitute the singing forebears of current dangdut singers. Of these early performers, Ellya Khadam, with her throbbing renditions, dynamism, and sensuality of performance, represented for many dangdut fans and singers the model of the quintessential dangdut performer. At present, Elvy Sukaiseh, dubbed *Ratu Dangdut* (dangdut queen), for her supposedly original *irama melayu* singing style (*suara asli irama melayu*), holds the distinction of being the successor of Ellya Khadam, though, in her own right, she has far outstripped the former in status, popularity and, particularly, in wealth.

Unfortunately, beyond a small circle of dangdut performers, Husein Bawafie, who perhaps deserves to be called the godfather of dangdut, has remained largely anonymous, his musical contributions eclipsed by the fame of media-spawned crop of younger dangdut performers. As well, I am inclined to believe that, besides possessing an unassuming personality, Husein Bawafie's role primarily as a musician/composer rather than as a solo performer may have also contributed to this lack of public recognition.<sup>13)</sup> The development of what was then called the "singing idol," or the "star" in the more contemporary sense, tended to focus attention on the solo performer-singer, largely overshadowing the creative role of the musicians. This practice, even more widespread in the current cultivation by the music industry of the star system and the star image, has rendered the musicians ubiquitous but invisible.

When the New Order reversed the pre-1965 official stance against pop imports, the deluge of Western pop, rock, and country music literally overwhelmed the development of *irama melayu* music. Along with these Western pop genres came Western technology in the form of sophisticated electrified musical instruments. Both the in-

corporation of Western style into the *irama melayu* tradition and the fusion of *orkes melayu* indigenous instruments such as the *gendang* (drum), *gambus* (lute), *suling* (bamboo flute), and the acoustic guitar with electrified ones such as the electric guitar, electric organs, piano, and the trap drum set, paved the way for more experimentation. This blending of both Eastern and Western melodies and instrumentation spawned the *irama melayu* variant, which would later be known as dangdut, as a new musical genre with its own aesthetics.

Western musicologists who have heard the music suggest that the term dangdut is an onomatopoeic realization of the rhythm derived from the North Indian *kaherva*, the popular meter in Indian film music, as it is played on a drum (*tabla*) and/or bass guitar (Manuel 1988; Hatch 1989). Hatch describes this rhythmic pattern as characterized by a low-pitched stroke on the fourth pulse followed by a high-pitched stroke on the first pulse of each four-pulse measure (Hatch 1989: 57). As it was used in the early 1970s, however, the term dangdut meant more than just the rhythmic pulse; it teemed with ideological implications. In the following discussion, I will try to examine the ideological roots of the word. In tracing its origins, questions concerning authority, who makes labelling decisions, or who has the power to define a sound as folk or pop, *kampung* or *gedongan* (lower-class/upper-class dichotomy corresponding with popular culture/high-culture opposition), need to be considered. Underlying these questions is the argument that if music's distinctive meaning is constituted in the very act of labelling, then the social processes through which such labels come to be agreed have to be examined (Bourdieu 1983; Frith 1989).

As far as the origin of the term dangdut is concerned, one of the most interesting developments in the aftermath of this music's current successes is the number of accounts that try to claim credit for its introduction. The curious thing about these accounts, however, is the differing opinion they offer.<sup>14)</sup> It is possible that the largely oral source of information had muddled this aspect of dangdut's beginnings. It is equally possible that dangdut's present popularity may have inspired these varying versions from certain interest groups now eager to claim a part in its development. One of the more plausible versions so far is Remy Sylado's account which contends that the word dangdut was first used in 1972 by members of a Bandung, West Java rock band as a term of ridicule for the then emerging *irama melayu* variant whose central musical characteristic was dominated by Indian-style percussion rhythms produced from a *tabla*-descended drum known locally as *gendang* or *kendang*. That same year, according to Sylado, the word came out for the first time in print when it appeared, albeit with deprecating implications, in an article by an Indonesian journalist named Billy Silabumi, and published in *Aktuil*, a popular magazine in which Sylado was the managing editor.<sup>15)</sup>

Underlying this negative attitude towards this musical variant of *irama melayu* at that time was the widespread perception among the circle of rock musicians that this music, which they deemed bereft of any aesthetic merits, was the music of the uneducated, lower-strata of Indonesian society. The most vicious critic among this

group was Benny Subardja, vocalist and guitarist of the rock band, *Giant Steps*. Subardja has immortalized himself in the records of dangdut's history with his infamous comments on dangdut as a kind of dog crap ("*musik dangdut tai anjing*"). Ironically, this provided one of the strongest impetuses for Rhoma Irama's dangdut innovations which would shortly undermine rock's own popularity.<sup>16)</sup>

To understand the source of these virulent attacks on *irama melayu*, it would be illuminating to consider, on the one hand, the social processes and the social context that gave rise to such prejudices and, on the other, the musical genres in conflict with each other and with the existing situation. Many observers of Indonesian musical landscape have often noted the country's infinitely rich variety of musical forms and experiences (Pemberton 1987; Manuel 1988; Hatch 1989). Broadly speaking, this musical landscape is dominated, on one extreme, by what is known in Indonesia as *musik akademis* or *musik klasik* (lit. 'art music'), consisting of traditional indigenous varieties of gamelan music associated with the royal courts and the aristocracy, and Western classical music preferred by upper-class intellectuals. On the other extreme, is popular music both Western, notably pop, rock, and jazz, and Western-inspired local versions. In between these two extremes may fall a wide assortment of other musical genres and sub-genres, including regional varieties.

To discuss the entire field of Indonesian music is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, but it might be worth noting, as a preliminary to my discussion of the Indonesian popular music situation in general, and dangdut in particular, that a kind of musical hierarchy<sup>17)</sup> operates in this musical field. This musical hierarchy bisects these two broad types of music along the line of the high-art/low-art dichotomy. Moreover, this musical hierarchy corresponds, more often than not, to the existing economic, cultural, and social hierarchy within the prevailing class relations (Bourdieu 1983). In the Indonesian social context, this hierarchy is expressed metaphorically by the distinction between '*gedongan*' (lit. concrete building, hence upper-class) and '*kampung*' (low-class).

Thus, within this musical hierarchy, *musik akademis*, by virtue of its supposed aesthetic merits and non-commercial nature, is deemed far more superior and consequently assigned to the top of this hierarchy. Furthermore, it is supported and patronized by the elite class of Indonesian society.<sup>18)</sup> On the other hand, because it is mass-produced and highly commercialized, popular music is often viewed as inferior and consequently situated in the lower rung of this hierarchy. Supporters and patrons of popular music generally come from the lower social strata of society, although, depending on the specific pop music genre, the Western ones in particular, fans are often from the elite segment of the population.

Each of these two broad musical types, however, is in turn characterized by a hierarchy between its own genres whose structures replicate those of the broader musical hierarchy's own configurations. Three factors — aesthetic, economic, and ideological — overlap to serve both as boundaries that delimit the territory held by competing genres within the hierarchy, and as agents in the production and preservation of this



hierarchy. In my own research, I found these three factors at the root of *rock-irama melayu* conflict.<sup>19)</sup> In the following discussion, I will focus on this hierarchy between genres in Indonesian popular music which framed the 1970s *rock-irama melayu* controversy<sup>20)</sup> and eventually gave rise to the development of dangdut as a distinct musical idiom, providing perhaps one of the best illustrations of what Bourdieu calls the “reordering of the hierarchy of genres” (1983: 335). In discussing this, I will concentrate on the way the aesthetic, economic and ideological factors intersect to keep competing genres in place, specifically, the way rock tried to use these factors to undermine *irama melayu*’s rise to the top of the pop music hierarchy.

### 1) Aesthetic Factors

Fundamental political changes brought on by the New Order government after 1965 ushered in a deluge of Western influences which irrevocably transformed many aspects of Indonesian life. In the field of popular music, these changes introduced freely into the country not only Western popular music, notably pop, rock and jazz, but modern instrumentations in the form of electric and electronic musical instruments, sophisticated process of musical production and reproduction, particularly cassette technology and, along with these, global pop norms and values. In the 1970s, these Western musical influences in the main constituted the evolving aesthetic criteria against which the merits of a particular pop music genre may be judged (Sylado 1983). These same criteria also determined the place of a pop music form in the pop music hierarchy.

Of the variety of pop music genres which competed for both market and audience, pop and rock music were at the top of the popular music hierarchy. First, their widely, if wrongly, perceived sophistication in music making and use of modern musical technology was supposed to approximate closely the pop aesthetic ideal of the time. Second, the closer these local versions resembled their Western models, the more artistically successful they were viewed, although most of the time they sounded more like Indonesian translations of the original (Sylado 1983).

It appears that for many practitioners and supporters of both pop and rock music at that time, modernization was synonymous with Westernization which in turn meant prestige.<sup>21)</sup> Accordingly, the use of Westernized aesthetic criteria was at once a means to impose legitimate definition for what constitutes an artistic popular music, as well as an expedient to assure pop and rock music a secure place on the top of the hierarchy, and with it, economic leverage and cultural prestige.

About the same time, however, there were other groups who were not entirely convinced that to modernize meant aping Western models (Frederick 1982; Sylado 1983b). The emerging variant of *irama melayu* was one of the by-products of the continuing experimentation and search for a modern Indonesian music that best expressed what Frederick calls the “Indonesian countenance” (*wajah Indonesia*) (Frederick 1982: 124). This emerging *irama melayu* variant turned out to sound more indigenous in the way that neither pop nor rock did. On the basis of the existing pop

music aesthetic criteria, however, *irama melayu* was relegated to the bottom of the musical hierarchy.

First, *irama melayu* was deemed destitute of any aesthetic value mainly because its instrumentations and melodic patterns had remained largely indigenous and, therefore, primitive. Second, its practitioners had neither access to the sophisticated electric and electronic instruments nor the musical know-how to play them. Third, *irama melayu*'s non-Western musical roots were blamed for its musical backwardness. Fourth, the rather sub-standard quality of *irama melayu*'s cassette recordings during that time was used against it as a sign of the lack of quality of the music itself. It is evident then that the use of the Westernized aesthetic criteria was an instrument of control to contain *irama melayu* within a designated space in the prevailing musical hierarchy.<sup>22)</sup>

## 2) Economic Factors

Aesthetic criteria, however, are not the only basis for determining the place of a musical idiom in the musical hierarchy. Economic factors also play a decisive role in assigning more value on one genre over another. In the case of *irama melayu*, its emerging popularity proved to be a disadvantage only because it threatened to displace other competing forms from their supposedly legitimate place in the hierarchy. The 1970s was one of the brightest decades in the history of dangdut's development as a distinct musical genre. This period showed *irama melayu* developing a huge following, albeit among the lower-classes, which, to this day, happen to constitute the largest portion of the Indonesian population. By its sheer size, the lower-class audience represented a potentially vast market that competing genres can neither afford to ignore nor lose.

From the economic point of view, the growing popularity of this *irama melayu* variant was a threat to the position of other musical genres then competing for an audience and a market. Among these musical forms most threatened by *irama melayu*'s ascendancy was rock music, and along with it, the dominant groups it represented. It meant that rock stood to lose a considerable size of the audience and with that the volume of profits they previously dominated. Thus, there was an economic logic, slanted in favor of rock, to label *irama melayu* as inferior by calling it dangdut. By doing so, rock hoped to influence audience taste by playing on aesthetic merits as a marketing ploy.

Despite their best efforts, rock groups were not always successful in discrediting this *irama melayu* variant as the latter's growing popularity illustrated. Although this is another aspect of the politics of pop music, the fact worth mentioning here is that audiences make conscious choices about the kind of music they would patronize, an indication that audiences, far from being duped by producers of cultural forms, are always in a position to refuse to consume or to consume and appropriate such forms for their own expressive purposes. It is also possible to read in this situation the ways in which certain groups may resist any form of hegemonic imposition to serve their



own interest.

### 3) Ideological Factors

Of the factors underlying the production and preservation of hierarchy between genres in the popular music field, the ideological dimension is perhaps the most insidious. In Althusser's view, the power of ideology resides in the way it operates to naturalize into the common-sense frequently asymmetrical situations as the way they are, concealing the imbalances in power structures and class relations, more often than not, in the interest of the dominant groups (Fiske 1987). As this operated in the *rock-irama melayu* conflict, the campaign by rock groups to discredit *irama melayu* by branding it as naturally bereft of any aesthetic merits and spreading negative perceptions of this music was an attempt not only to conceal their own economic interests but, more specifically, to maintain their prestigious status and position in the pop music hierarchy and in the eyes of the general public.

Rock groups proceeded to accomplish this by alleging that *irama melayu*'s low position in the musical hierarchy was attributed to several factors. First, the inferiority of its performance contexts. At this time, *irama melayu*'s turf was the 'ghetto' of Indonesian society: overcrowded *kampungs*, slums, prostitution districts, streetsides, or lower-class family festivities such as wedding celebrations (*pesta perkawinan*) and circumcision ceremonies (*hajat sunatan*).<sup>23)</sup> This music's association with the sordid and the disreputable has identified it as belonging to the lower strata of society and with this, the accompanying reputation of being *kampung*. Second, *irama melayu*'s roots were non-western culture and tradition and therefore viewed during that time as inferior.<sup>24)</sup>

Third, the inferiority of its performance style. During this time, *irama melayu*'s performance, owing mainly to its performance contexts, was hardly different from ordinary busking. On occasions that *orkes melayu* bands were given the opportunity to perform in better surroundings, their performance, it was said, had neither the dynamism nor the glitter and fanfare of rock concerts with their often extravagant visual, lighting and sound effects. Fourth, *irama melayu*'s performers and fans came from predominantly lower-class social, educational and economic background, a majority of whom being denizens of slummy *kampungs* or migrants from rural villages. Fifth, *irama melayu*'s lyrical themes were frequently criticized either as mawkish, salacious, or merely simplistic and these were deemed to be a reflection of lower-class taste, morality, and low level of intelligence (Frederick 1982: 125).

As these factors illustrate, rock's assessment of *irama melayu* as a "dog crap music" had little to do with the latter's formal musical qualities. Rather, this was a product not so much of aesthetic decisions as of cultural politics. These ideological factors may account for the contradiction between *irama melayu*'s emerging commercial popularity and its low cultural prestige. This same lack of convergence between popularity and prestige continues to hound present-day dangdut despite its successful rise to the top of the popular music hierarchy.

But what the *rock-irama melayu* opposition also indicates is that the struggle between musical genres is inseparable from the struggle between the dominated classes and the dominant class (Bourdieu 1983). This struggle was embodied in the distinction between *gedongan* and *kampungan*, a distinction which represented one of the ways in which the elites protected their social and economic position. Paradoxically, such exclusionary distinctions only served to heighten lower-class identity. The *rock-irama melayu* conflict became the plane of contestation where, on the one hand, rock struggled to maintain its own interest and, on the other, *irama melayu* tried to contest this process. Within the framework of this cultural struggle, Rhoma Irama's innovations were among the strongest challenges to rock's position and rock's attempt at cultural ordering. His defiant appropriation of the word, *dangdut*, as a label of identity exemplified not so much the attempt to resist as to contest cultural hegemony.

In the area of cultural production, the process of 'labelling' not only represents attempts by dominant groups to control cultural forms, but plays a central part in the production and preservation of hierarchy. The concept of labelling echoes Bourdieu's argument that the field of cultural production is "the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition," (Bourdieu 1983) in this present case, of *irama melayu*. Bourdieu's own term which comes closest to the notion of labelling is "to consecrate" or "to give authority to" (Bourdieu 1983: 323). But this is only one aspect of labelling for the other side of the process means just the opposite. Labelling is at once an instrument of inclusion and exclusion. Instead of being used to consecrate, it may also be used to invalidate. And this is exactly how this process has been used in the *rock-irama melayu* conflict.

Labelling *irama melayu* as *dangdut* and consequently as low-class was thus a rhetorical attempt by Indonesian rock groups not only to legitimate their position, but also to fortify their status and claims and those of the dominant culture with which they were associated. Ironically, the process of labelling also betrayed the tension within the musical hierarchy and, far from signifying rock's eminent position, actually exposed the tenuousness of its own claims.

There is yet another paradox in this situation. According to Bourdieu, "one of the difficulties of orthodox defence against heretical transformation of the field by a re-definition of the tacit or explicit terms of entry is the fact that polemics imply a form of recognition; an adversary whom one would prefer to destroy by ignoring him cannot be combated without consecrating him" (1983: 323). The *rock-irama melayu* conflict provides the best example of this highly ironic situation. Labelling *irama melayu* as *dangdut*, with all the word's deprecating connotations, only served to give it the recognition rock sought to prevent. Deeply rooted in a paradox, labelling is also at once a weapon of attack and, unwittingly, of recognition.

Although the aesthetic, economic and ideological factors function as the condition of entry allowing, or disallowing as the case may be, competing musical genres to cross-over boundaries within the musical hierarchy, these factors cannot prevent altogether the rise of one genre to a higher plane in the hierarchy or the displacement of

one genre by another. This is so, Bourdieu contends, because the frontiers of the hierarchy are highly permeable. As one of the most significant properties of cultural production, extreme permeability of frontiers underlies “the extreme dispersion and the conflicts between rival principles of legitimacy” (1983: 324). This notion of “permeability of frontiers” may partly account for *irama melayu*’s successful breach of boundaries and consequent rise to the top of the hierarchy, a turn of events which reordered the pop music hierarchy. The position of dangdut music in the popular music hierarchy in the present time is an excellent example of this process.

The incessant struggle for eminence between the genres indicates not only the permeability of frontiers, but also the shifting and fluid nature of the boundaries and the tenuousness of each genre’s position in the hierarchy, owing in part to the many complex economic, political and cultural factors within the social context itself. Thus, although dangdut reached the top of the hierarchy in 1979, it began to decline in the early 80s to be eased out of dominant position, albeit briefly, by new musical trends in the pop and country tradition. This decline prompted many observers to predict the beginning of dangdut’s end.<sup>25)</sup>

Contrary to such predictions, however, the second half of the 80s witnessed a remarkable resurgence of dangdut’s popularity. Propelled to the top of the Indonesian popular music industry, it continues today to hold sway over other pop genres. Yet, it remains impossible to foretell how long dangdut’s current preeminence would last, or which genre might next emerge into prominence. This situation not only attests to the dynamic nature of cultural forms like pop music, but also points, once again, to the field of cultural production as the site of contestation (Fiske 1987).

The use of this term which inaugurated the emergence of this music as a distinct musical idiom has been attributed to dangdut superstar, Rhoma Irama, who, in the early 70s, appropriated the word into the lyrics of one of his early compositions which became a hit. Rhoma Irama is fond of emphasizing that his decision to use what was then a term of derision was motivated by a sense of defiance against upper-class prejudice towards this music. In his own words:

The word dangdut actually embodied contempt. Contempt by the *haves* towards this *kampung* [lower class] music. They scorned the sound of *gendang* that was dominant in *orkes melayu*. Later, this contempt we hurled back to them through a song that we entitled Dangdut . . . Just say that with this music, I was trying to make a statement. Through this song, we defined our identity: this is our type of music! If you like to listen, please do; if you don’t, please leave us alone because we, too, have our own identity.<sup>26)</sup>

From then on, the word dangdut became the name for the *irama melayu* variant which would later revolutionize the musical tastes of many Indonesians.

Although Frederick rightly claims that among urban intellectuals and upper-class society in the early 70s, dangdut meant nothing more than the “thumpety-thump” rhythms of the lower-class, one missing dimension in his analysis is that he does not

explain why this labelling was necessary, what brought it about, or what criteria it was based on. More keen on showing dangdut phenomenon as a reflection of current situation, he fails to consider the Indonesian popular music field at that time as the site of struggles in which pop, rock, and *irama melayu*, among other genres, competed for musical legitimacy, for control of musical forms, as well as control of the market for their musical products.

### **Dangdut, Rhoma Irama and William Frederick**

Any attempt at charting the history of dangdut music is incomplete without taking into account the dangdut superstar, Rhoma Irama, and his role in its development. As the central figure behind the rise of this musical idiom, the development of Rhoma Irama's career parallels dangdut's own musical evolution. As this is the only published material on dangdut's most famous musician, Frederick's article serves as the best point of entry for examining Irama's musical achievements and how these had contributed to dangdut's growth as one of Indonesia's most popular new music genres. It is also the best starting point for scrutinizing Frederick's own interpretation of the dangdut phenomenon and his profile of Rhoma Irama as dangdut superstar. There is something, however, that I will refrain from doing and that is going into Rhoma Irama's biography in detail. Part of the reason is that Frederick has done a good job at it.

But there is yet another reason for my hesitation in this matter. There is no reason to doubt Frederick's account of this aspect of Rhoma Irama's life but the varying versions which followed the publication of this article has made it difficult to sift fact from fiction. Although no book-length account of Rhoma Irama's biography has been published, Frederick's profile of him has generated an efflorescence of versions as newspapers and magazines, taking their inspiration from this Western academic's endorsement, began to devote extensive coverage of Rhoma Irama, most of these highly romanticized.<sup>27)</sup> To date, no other figure in Indonesia can match Irama's record as a media creature. Rhoma Irama, himself, further complicates this issue with his propensity to refer to Frederick constantly to the point that one familiar with the article and has read Rhoma Irama's own account might begin to wonder who is taking the cue from whom.

One of Frederick's interesting observations about dangdut's early stage is that dangdut practitioners had been "slow to examine critically the genre they invented and nurtured" (1982: 104). At the rate that present dangdut observers and Rhoma Irama allude to Frederick seems to suggest that this article has given them the vocabulary to talk about this music. The question this turn-of-events raises, however, involves not so much the variety of interpretation as the authority of the sources of these interpretations, realizing, as we do now, that these interpretations have not become available to us in any unmediated form.

Another reason for my hesitation is that I have become aware of the 'cosmetic reconstruction' that goes into the process of making a star or what Hennion calls, "the

production of success” (Hennion 1983). In this insightful article, Hennion underscores the process of ‘mediation’ (a notion conspicuously absent in Frederick’s analysis) by the singer/producer relationship, between the singer’s real-life story and his public.<sup>28)</sup> This process involves ‘reconstructing’ not only the singer’s voice and image, but his life-story as well which will enable him, Hennion contends, “to express himself on stage in a role which, while obeying a precise set of show-business rules, is genuinely true-to-life” (Hennion 1983: 185).

This process of ‘reconstruction,’ it appears, need not always have a basis in fact. Yet, as a vital mechanism in fulfilling the public’s desire to identify, it could spell the lasting success of a singer. Blacking’s comment that “just as art can reflect and challenge society, so social life can be modelled on art” comes to mind (Blacking 1987: 259). My own impression of *the Rhoma Irama* I met during my fieldwork was of one who has modelled his life on his romanticized biography and living up to it. Just how much of the process that goes into the production of success has come to Frederick’s attention when he profiled Rhoma Irama is unclear in his article.

Needless to repeat, as the only comprehensive account on dangdut and on Rhoma Irama during the first ten years, the importance of Frederick’s article cannot be overstressed. Some problems, however, are readily apparent. By focusing on one single dangdut figure is at once this article’s strength as well as its weakness. On the one hand, it describes an excellent picture of how the vision of one man has transformed the character of dangdut music, giving it the face of the much-sought after Indonesian image (*wajah Indonesia*). On the other hand, focusing on the role of a single individual imposes certain obvious limitations, among which is the tendency to exclude anything or anyone that does not relate significantly to the subject at hand. Without questioning Rhoma Irama’s secure position in dangdut’s hall of fame or denigrating his contributions to dangdut’s musical development, I would like to point out, however, that dangdut and Rhoma Irama are not synonymous. Neither is Rhoma Irama responsible for inventing the genre.<sup>29)</sup>

Frederick, for his part, recognizes this limitation, maintaining that it would be absurd to suggest that in the life-story of a single recording star, one might be able to read a microcosm of national life (1982: 104). However, his argument that Rhoma Irama’s life story and ideas reveal much about contemporary Indonesia is problematic. First, because it inevitably invites the fundamental question about the element of truth contained in this life story, a moot issue in itself. Second, it misses the role the industry plays in the process of social construction of the image in the discovery/production of a singer’s performing personality (Hennion 1983). Third, it also misses the role the industry and its various gatekeepers, in particular, the mass media, play in the process of ‘mediation,’ in Hennion’s term, “mass-mediation,” which finally conveys this constructed ‘star image’ to the public. Such an argument ignores the ideological relations and practices embedded in the business practices of the pop industry, foremost of which is the process of making a star. This process involves in the main the ‘reconstruction’ of the star’s personality in order to fit the industry’s notion of an

image that will sell, a process that involves ‘rewriting’ the star’s biography, often including a succession of difficulties (Hennion 1983).<sup>30)</sup>

Aware now of these processes underlying the production of success, I would be wary about making connections between a star’s life-story and the social context. Somewhere in this article, Frederick comments that in less than a decade, Rhoma Irama “was transformed — or perhaps transformed himself — into one of the best-paid and most widely-recognized contemporary Indonesians, and musician who changed the face of Indonesian music” (1982: 108). In my view, focusing on how this transformation came about and the processes involved in it might have turned out to be a more fruitful line of inquiry.

Dangdut’s musical evolution was the product of many musical minds working together. Similarly, and consequently, what may be generally described as dangdut music, though growing out of the same *irama melayu* musical roots, is not one music but comprised of several musical variants bound together by shared structural characteristics, rhythmic and melodic motifs, instrumental and vocal qualities. Each variant has each own musical practitioners, predominantly urban musicians competing for a place in the highly lucrative niches in the music industry.

In the 1970s, for instance, the word evolved into a generic term to refer to at least three stylistic variations of the *irama melayu* tradition.<sup>31)</sup> One was dangdut *melayu Deli*, so called because, according to observers, it retained the *melayu Deli* melodic and instrumental arrangements although what this meant musically was unclear. A second variant was referred to as Arab/Indian dangdut, so called because of the predominance of string and percussion rhythms and the characteristic Middle Eastern melismatic singing style. The third variant was called dangdut *pribumi* or indigenous dangdut. What aspects of its musical character or stylistic features made this more indigenous than the other variants also remained nebulous.

What is significant about this situation was not, again, the number of variants that emerged, which was perhaps an indication of the richness of the music and the creativity of its musicians, but the number of differing interpretations regarding these variants. There were as many interpretations of the sort instanced above as there were many observers, a tendency which recalls to mind Bourdieu’s argument that the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition, in this case, of dangdut music. These competing interpretations represent the attempts by various interest groups to acquire what Bourdieu calls, “the monopoly of the power to say with authority,” itself a form of consecrating the producer, in this case, the musicians, and the product of dangdut music.

The efflorescence of these interpretations and the rate with which they constantly change in both attitude and point of view, particularly in the wake of dangdut’s recent successes, suggest another aspect of cultural production and that is its emergent quality. Writers as diverse as Geertz (1972), Turner (1982), and Raymond Williams (1980) have variously pointed out that cultural production is a process involving a



continuous generation of meanings. Moreover, such meanings, contrary to conservative views, do not always reflect their social setting, but may challenge or caricature it. Corollary to this view of the emergent quality of cultural production is the notion, central to the works of cultural studies, of the audience as active ‘decoders’ of meanings. The plurality of these interpretations may attest to the ways in which the Indonesian public has tried to make sense of the overwhelming presence and experience of dangdut music.

The musical evolution of dangdut was not the work of just one man, but of a number of other ubiquitous but invisible musicians and artists whose equally important creative contributions to dangdut will perhaps never be fully known or acknowledged simply because they did not have the privilege of publicity or scholarly attention that Rhoma Irama had.<sup>32)</sup> For instance, about the time that Rhoma Irama was riding the crest of popularity with his distinctive innovations, at least three other figures were quietly casting their own musical styles and forming their own musical niches.<sup>33)</sup> Unfortunately, the absence of empirical data on their individual musical styles has made it not only difficult but impossible to ascertain the exact nature of their musical contributions to the development of dangdut.

One was Reynold Panggabean with his *OM Tarantula*, perhaps the first dangdut band to introduce dangdut music to an international audience in Japan in 1982. At the height of its own popularity, *OM Tarantula* was also considered among the few elite dangdut bands and this reputation was attributed first, to the performance style and costuming of the group, and second, to its musical style that emphasized percussive ornamentations.<sup>34)</sup> *OM Tarantula*’s use of Western suit complete with coat and tie, and short, neat hairstyle projected the look of a Western executive that appealed to the Westernized taste of middle-class Indonesians at a time when dangdut was generally perceived as low-class or *kampungan*. At the same time, this kind of costuming provided a sharp contrast to Rhoma Irama’s Arabian Nights-inspired Islamic couture. Adding glamour to *Tarantula*’s image was Panggabean’s wife, Camelia Malik, the female lead vocal whose more classy look, beautiful appearance and stage presence, more than her singing ability (considered by many critics to be ordinary), continue to date to be her most marketable appeal.<sup>35)</sup> Unfortunately, Panggabean’s group disbanded as his marriage disintegrated.

The other was Mansyur S. whose dangdut style has stayed close to the original *orkes melayu* compositions both in musical arrangement and in the romantic themes of the lyrics. This kind of musical arrangement followed the *orkes melayu*’s use of Arab, Indian, and Indonesian drum, flute, and lute-like instruments. The dominant themes were frequently highly sentimental, either celebrating romantic love or mourning its end, or about infidelity or miserable poverty. At present, one of the most interesting aspects of Mansyur’s dangdut variant is the predominance of young, female dangdut performers who are currently among the highest paid in the entertainment industry. In this group also belong some of the top male dangdut performers, the likes of Meggy Z. or Hamdan ATT, whose talent fees run to several million rupiah for

a single performance.

A group which, for a few good reasons, deserves to be given more attention than it has received so far is the all-female band, *OM Ken Dedes*. First, this group has been around for the last sixteen years, having been organized in 1976, just three years after Rhoma Irama set up his *Soneta*. Second, this group's dangdut repertoire, like the *Soneta*'s, is also a syncretic blend of *irama melayu* and rock music. Third, besides being an all-female group, the *Ken Dedes* musicians are required to possess not only the ability to sing, but also the skill to play at least two musical instruments. To achieve this level of competence, the group's management sends its musicians to formal musical training at the Yamaha music school, something never heard of in the usual practices of many dangdut bands. Fourth, this group is perhaps the first to introduce dangdut music to Malaysia and Brunei. Despite these achievements, however, *Ken Dedes* has a surprisingly low profile. The meager media attention they have received so far frequently focused less on their musical style and accomplishments and rather more on the culinary skills of Titiek Nur, the group's band leader. Moreover, these culinary skills were not viewed as personal accomplishments, but as a secret to be mastered to keep the husband at home.<sup>36)</sup>

Underlying this type of media coverage seems to be the prevailing gender culture whose overwhelming influence structures not only the practices of the music industry and the mass media, but the whole social institutions. Its structuring of women's role within the sphere of the domestic rather than the public has often led to the marginalization of women and the diminution, if not exclusion, of their accomplishments. The *Ken Dedes* situation illustrates one of the ways in which local gender ideology operates and its effects on the experiences of women. In the case of Titiek Nur, this kind of structuring begins right in her own backyard.<sup>37)</sup>

The sweeping popularity of dangdut in the second half of the 1970s inspired the mushrooming of a number of dangdut bands eager to share in the lucrative entertainment industry. An interesting development in this area was the emergence of university based dangdut groups. One was a University of Indonesia group known as *OM* ("Orkes Moral" rather than *orkes melayu*) *Pancaran Sinar Petromak*. Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta also had two groups, *Jaran Goyang* and *OM* ("Orkes Mahasiswa") *Jet Set* (acronym for *Jelek tapi Stil*, lit. ugly but stylish).<sup>38)</sup>

Since these groups specialized in parodies, caricature, and occasional satire, just exactly what political stance they held or advocated was difficult to determine. Nevertheless, their presence generated a lot of interest and from various sectors at least two differing opinions had been proffered. One suggested that the growth of '*kampus dangdut*' was a by-product of the intellectual groups', in particular, the students', experience of frustration at their lack of social and political participation.<sup>39)</sup> Frederick speculates that this trend might be a form of "*kegenitan sosial*" (populist chic) among the middle class, inspired mainly by dangdut's popular appeal among the lower classes (1982: 124). In the end, however, such groups were no more than fads and while their brief presence contributed to the polemics underlying the *gedongan*-

*kampungan* debate, they cannot be said to have left or made neither lasting nor significant contribution to the musical development of dangdut itself.

### **Rhoma Irama and the *Soneta* Group Style**

To put Rhoma Irama's musical accomplishments in proper perspective, it would be useful to begin by clarifying a point often taken for granted by many of his fans, one mainly obscured by Irama's overwhelming popularity beginning in the second half of the 70s: Rhoma Irama invented neither the genre, which is properly known as *irama melayu*, nor the term, dangdut, itself. There are, however, three things that can perhaps be correctly attributed to him. First, his use of the term dangdut in one of his early compositions. By all accounts, this appropriation represented an open defiance to the then prevailing negative attitude towards dangdut by using it as a badge of identity.

Second, Rhoma Irama may be credited for introducing at least four important innovations to dangdut music: lyrics, arrangement, instrumentation, and performance style. Third, the result of this innovation is a particular variant of dangdut music which is a syncretic blend of the musical elements of *orkes melayu* and Western rock music. Rhoma Irama himself has been loathe to describe his own music as dangdut, preferring instead to call it *Soneta*. The reason he gives for this is that dangdut music itself is made up of several other variants and the *Soneta* music, he insists, is in a class of its own, quite apart from other dangdut variants.<sup>40)</sup>

Rhoma Irama began his musical career, by his own description, as a "*penyanyi amfibi*" (lit. amphibious singer).<sup>41)</sup> This metaphor he uses to describe his simultaneous involvement with both pop and *irama melayu* music in the late 60s and early 70s. During this time, he was singing for at least two pop bands, *Gayhand* and *Tornado*, which played current Western pop hits at more reputable venues on Saturday nights. At the same time, he was involved with several *orkes melayu* groups, singing duet with a number of female singers,<sup>42)</sup> at slummy *kampung*s' domestic celebrations and at low-class bars and nightclubs. Although, at the start, this involvement was motivated largely by economic expedient, this first-hand experience with two different kinds of music at vastly different social contexts has been influential, on the one hand, in honing Rhoma Irama's musical talents, and on the other, in sharpening his awareness and understanding of the life of lower-class Indonesians. These two elements, combined with a shrewd pragmatism and an innate business sense, constituted the formula of success which would later confirm on Rhoma Irama the superstar status in Indonesian popular music.

It should be remembered that about this time, the word dangdut was in currency as a term of ridicule for *irama melayu*. It was this prejudice, according to Rhoma Irama, which provided him with the catalyst to introduce innovations into *irama melayu*. His exposure to pop music, then considered far more aesthetically superior, made him not only sensitive to what were then considered to be *irama melayu*'s aesthetic deficiencies, but also directed his creative impulses to areas in which this music might be

improved. Consequently, when he formed his own group in 1973, he had already identified the four areas which, according to him, required the much-needed aesthetic facelift: (1) instrumentation, (2) arrangement, (3) lyrics, and (4) performance.<sup>43)</sup>

While still singing for *orkes melayu*, Rhoma Irama, with Elvy Sukaiseh as his singing partner, already began making changes in the arrangement of *melayu* compositions by varying the instrumentation and phrasing of their numbers to produce, according to Frederick, more variety in tone and in texture. In addition, the rhythmic motif of this music was also modified to make it dynamic and expressive. Although Rhoma Irama was keen to experiment further, and seemed to have had a few ideas to start with, there was, however, little he could do, limited as he was by the musical ensembles over which he had no control. The lack of opportunity to put into test some of the ideas he had in mind presented the need to set up his own musical ensemble and on October 13, 1973, he formed the *Soneta Group*. Irama insists the choice of this name owed to his fondness for the 14-line verse form and not, as Frederick suggests, to the popular trend at that time.<sup>44)</sup>

Conflicting claims attend the reason behind the formation of this group. Frederick saw it quite rightly, I believe, as both a musical and an economic expedient which provided Irama “both creative elbowroom and a certain degree of financial independence with which to experiment” (1982: 110). In his recent interviews, however, Irama insists that his main motivation for forming *Soneta Group* was “to wage war against evil in one’s heart and in music.”<sup>45)</sup> By his own account, the music’s association with alcohol, women, and good-time prompted him to return music to its “*mulia*” (lit. sublime) and “*suci*” (lit. holy, cleansed or pure) roots through a musical group that was itself *suci*.<sup>46)</sup> A little anecdote Irama is fond of recounting at interviews these days describes the day he announced his intention to fight Satan in and through music. According to this story, Irama was supposed to have extended his hand and challenged his friends who shared his conviction to lay their hands on top of his. Seven musicians did, and *Soneta Group, The Sound of Moslem*, was born. That was what purportedly happened in 1973. Yet, one interview question later, Rhoma Irama, by his own account, admits he did not become a “*Moslem yang rasional*” (lit. rational Moslem) till 1975,<sup>47)</sup> a conviction, he claims, he finally reached while staying one week at Hotel Sari Pacific and another week at the Hilton.<sup>48)</sup> This was, according to him, the culmination of four years of studying all the major religions of the world.

It seems unlikely that inconsistencies, not to say hyperbole, of this sort can be attributed solely to failing memory. It is equally unlikely that Irama, given the seemingly scripted quality of his interview accounts, missed the inconsistencies in them. On the other hand, as Rhoma Irama continually demonstrates, poetic licence is one of the privileges that comes with celebrity status.

As far as the development of Irama’s music is concerned, Frederick’s account describes four criteria that Rhoma Irama was supposed to have identified as the basis for his musical innovations: “it must be broadly popular, cutting across class lines and appealing to the sensibilities of Indonesians of all sorts; it must be unmistakably mod-

ern; and it must carry a message, however simple, in a language that was easily grasped by young people everywhere. Finally this new music must neither reveal an obvious kinship with Western styles — the goal was unmistakably ‘Indonesian’ or at least an ‘Eastern’ sound — nor merely imitate the existing *melayu-Deli* style with its Arab and Indian flourishes” (1982: 109).

These specifications, which Frederick is careful to point out as having been drawn as directly as possible from his interview with Rhoma Irama between 1978–1980, are clearly aesthetic or, specifically, musical criteria. It is evident they provide no indication either of Irama’s religious convictions or his personal views on Islam although, rather strangely, this interview took place three years after Irama had returned from Mecca and was said to have been deeply affected personally and professionally by the experience. This period was a time of intense religious activity by Irama using dangdut both as a musical and film medium for his Islamic message. Moreover, he had already begun writing his *dakwah* (religious) compositions about this time. That Rhoma Irama would rather emphasize the religious rather than the aesthetic dimension of his music more these last few years than he ever did during the first decade of his career invites speculation.<sup>49)</sup> In order to examine Irama’s contributions to dangdut, however, we have to go back to the early part of his career and there measure his accomplishments against the criteria he himself defined.

#### 1) Instrumentation

One of the most significant contributions of Rhoma Irama, and one also readily obvious, to the development of dangdut music was his introduction of electronic musical instruments and sound equipment. Into the original *orkes melayu* ensembles, he added electric guitars, one of which he himself plays, a brass section, a tympani, an organ and powerful acoustical equipment. Irama’s *Soneta Group* owns, perhaps, the most sophisticated and most complete collection of instrumental ensemble at the present time, far surpassing, ironically, many rock bands who earlier used modern instrumentation as one of the trademarks of their aesthetic superiority. Apart from the established recording companies, Irama is perhaps the only single recording star in the early nineties with a 16-track recording equipment of his own.

It should be recalled that much of the impetus for this particular innovation was, paradoxically, provided by rock groups who used to ridicule the primitive state of *irama melayu*’s instrumental ensemble. Irama, by arrogating upon his group the very symbols of rock’s aesthetic supremacy, was not only rising to the challenge of his critics, but was contesting their right to such symbols. On the other hand, it should also be remembered that Irama’s own musical criteria quite plainly specified that his music must not reveal an obvious kinship with Western styles. Yet, the instruments that he and his *Soneta Group* have been using are electrified and stylistically crafted, utilizing to the fullest Western technology and ingenuity which he frequently criticizes but could not reject.

Against his critics who censured his appropriation of rock instruments, Irama de-

fended his syncretic innovation as a form of adaptation and response to changing conditions, needs, self-image, and aspirations. Irama's ambivalence owes in part to his failure to understand the complex processes that created popular music culture, in the main, the rise of modern technology, the encroachment of international influences and global pop norms and values, the intervention of the mass media, and the commercial practices of the pop music industry. In my view, Irama's contradictory stance makes sense only in the context of his embeddedness within the institutional practices of pop music industry, in particular, the pull between aesthetic objectives and economic imperatives.

## 2) Arrangement

Along with the incorporation of modernized instrumentation, Rhoma Irama also began making further changes in the melodic motif, combining in a syncretic manner the original *orkes melayu* ballad format with many elements of Western rock music, notably, the style of the British rock band, *Deep Purple*. Like his utilization of sophisticated musical technology, this modified arrangement also deviated from his original specifications and, again, like the former, was also a creative resistance to exclusionary tendencies of elitist cultural forms like rock music. The result, according to Frederick was "an energetic style that pumped the *melayu* song full of liquid, flowing rhythm and highlighted its characteristic waves of melody" (1982: 110). The irresistible quality of this beat compelled an affective response from its listeners, starting the trend of a dance style known as *joget*, which would later popularize mass public dancing.

## 3) Lyrics

One important aspect of *irama melayu* music that became a recipient of Irama's musical innovations was in the area of lyrics. The lyrical motifs of the earlier *melayu* compositions tended to be sentimental, complementing the usual romantic and nostalgic themes as well as those about personal misfortunes, ill-fate, or poverty. This emotionalism had often been singled out for censure by critics who equated it with the songs' lower-class image. Sensitive to these criticisms, Rhoma Irama started to work out ways of mixing medium and message, stressing the importance of the message, conveyed in a language that was easily understood across all levels of Indonesian society. Irama was not a particularly gifted lyricist, but his compositions, nevertheless, made up in direct and simple expressions communicated in contemporary vocabulary what they lacked in imagination, fulfilling his intention to entertain as well as to educate. The simple, down-to-earth narratives of his lyrics, spiced with humor and delivered in standard Indonesian, have frequently been cited as the reason both for the overwhelming popularity of his songs among the non-elite audiences, as well as for the *kampungan* or lower-class character of this music.

Unperturbed by these negative valuations of his music, Irama, knowing by now that he has reached, and could win, an even wider public than he had originally ex-



pected proceeded to record more of this same variety, consolidating for himself a vast following and, consequently, an equally vast market among the non-elite Indonesians. It would be difficult, in fact, to miss the workings of an innate business talent. Frederick is right in suggesting that Irama's successes may have been largely due to his intuitive feel for the public and unerring business sense. The release of his album *Begadang*, in 1975, followed by several other volumes and series of films in the second half of the 1970s eventually conferred on Irama the status of a "superstar."<sup>50</sup> By this time, it could be said that Irama had successfully toppled, one by one, the barriers that rock groups originally tried to put in the way.

Irama's return from the Haj during the second decade of the 1970s began a period of intensely religious musical activity for the *Soneta Group*. The storytelling and moralizing style of Irama's earlier compositions gave way this time to a species of dangdut variants, known as dangdut *dakwah*, which would later become the exclusive trademark of the *Soneta* musical repertoire. The central characteristic of these songs was their conscious Islamic message and their unique feature was the inclusion of Koranic verses that Irama recites as introduction. The songs, which until then included moralistic messages, have, by now, become openly didactic with both the themes and the words frequently drawn or paraphrased from Koranic passages. One of the best examples that Frederick provides here is from a musical track of one of Irama's films, entitled *Raja Dangdut*. According to Frederick, the song entitled "Laillah Haillalah," became an immensely popular dance music despite its narrative content:

*Bismillah hirohmanirohchim kulhu allah hu ahad allah hu somad  
lam yahid walam yulad walam yakkul lahu kufuan ahad.*

*Katakan Tuhan itu satu  
Tuhan tempat menyembah dan tempat meminta  
Katakan Tuhan itu satu  
Tuhan tidak beranak dan tak diperanakkan*

*Laillah haillalah, tiada Tuhan selain Allah  
Laillah haillalah, tiada Tuhan selain Allah*

*Mengapa kau Tuhankan manusia, mengapa kau menuhankan benda  
Janganlah kau menduakan Dia, janganlah kau menyekutukanNya  
Alam dan isinya semua ciptaanNya, tiada satupun yang menyerupaiNya*

*Laillah haillalah, tiada Tuhan selain Allah  
Laillah haillalah, tiada Tuhan selain Allah*

(Translation)

*Bismillah hirohmanirohchim kulhu allah hu ahad allah hu somad  
lam yahid walam yulad walam yakkul lahu kufuan ahad.*

Say that God is One  
God, the object of our prayers and supplications  
Say that God is One  
God, who has no children and is the child of none

*Laillah haillalah*, there is no God but Allah  
*Laillah haillalah*, there is no God but Allah

Why do you worship human beings, why do you worship material things  
You shouldn't think there can be two of Him  
You shouldn't think He shares his holiness with others  
He created all of nature and there is nothing else like Him

*Laillah haillalah*, there is no God but Allah  
*Laillah haillalah*, there is no God but Allah<sup>51)</sup>

Apart from its rhythmical vigor, the particular significance of this song, Frederick claims, lies in its strong *dakwah* flavor exemplified by its affirmation of the central tenet of Islam: the fact of God, One, All-Powerful, Sovereign, Eternal. Frederick contends that although *dakwah* compositions were not new in the Indonesian music scene, it was Rhoma Irama who first introduced the direct Islamic references into his innovations, surprising, as a result, both devout and nominal Moslems alike. At one stage, Irama's use of these Koranic verses created a controversy in the Islamic circle and Irama had to justify this practice by pointing out that he recited, rather than sang, the verses and therefore he did not compromise the integrity of the *Koran*.

Another type of composition that Irama and his *Soneta Group* came to be known for is one that fuses *dakwah* message with social criticism in which Irama conveyed his concern for the erosion of Islamic identity and values. Irama found in dangdut the idea that songs could concern themselves with topics far wider than the conventional love themes. Yet, Irama did not altogether abandon romantic themes. He did, however, temper the usual love themes with moralizing, as in "Dasi dan Gincu," which he sang in duet with Riza Umami,

*Bukan bahu berbintang*  
*Bukan leher berdasi*  
*Yang kudambakan*  
*Pria yang punya hati*

Not the star-studded shoulders  
Nor the be-necktied neck  
What I long for  
Is a man with a heart

*Bukan alis berukir*  
*Bukan bibir bergincu*  
*Yang kudambakan*  
*Gadis yang punya malu*

Not the chiselled brows  
Nor the painted lips  
What I long for  
Is a woman with self-respect

*Cinta karena dasi*  
*Akan segera basi*

Love because of the necktie  
Will quickly fade away

*Cinta karena gincu  
Akan segera layu*

Love because of lipstick  
Will quickly wither away<sup>52)</sup>

With the *Koran* providing both the inspiration and the source of fundamental ideas for social criticism, he began to focus on problems of the common people, the powerful and the powerless, and the preservation of social and moral values. In these songs, as in his films, Irama is the moral hero at odds with alcoholism, gambling, violation of human rights, and sexual excesses. By emphasizing proper Islamic behavior, many of these songs have become the medium for Irama's call for a return to tried and tested conservative values. As in the song, "Haram," he expresses the Islamic conviction that drinking alcohol and sexual excesses are absolutely and invariably sinful,

*Kenapa e kenapa minuman itu haram  
Karena e karena merusak pikiran  
Kenapa e kenapa berzinah juga haram  
Karena e karena itu cara binatang  
Kenapa e kenapa semua yang asyik-asyik diharamkan  
Kenapa semua yang enak-enak itu dilarang . . .  
Ah, ah, ah itulah perangkap setan  
Umpannya bermacam-macam kesenangan, hei, hei, hei*

Why oh why is alcohol forbidden  
Because oh because it destroys the mind  
Why oh why is adultery forbidden  
Because oh because only animals do that  
Why oh why is everything pleasurable forbidden  
Why is everything that's fun prohibited . . .  
Ah, ah, ah that's the trap the Devil sets  
With all kinds of tempting baits, hey, hey, hey<sup>53)</sup>

In other compositions, Irama articulates his religious concerns, personal conviction, and sensitivity to the condition of the lower classes. In the egalitarian content of "Termenung," for instance, Irama ponders the hierarchical stratification prevailing in society,

*Mengapa manusia tiada sama  
Yang miskin yang kaya berbeda-beda  
Mengapa bercinta ada batasnya  
Yang miskin tak boleh dengan yang kaya*

Why are people not the same?  
Why are the poor and rich so different?  
Why does love have limits set  
That say rich and poor cannot be lovers?<sup>54)</sup>

and comments against the ideological division in the Indonesian society exemplified

by the widening gap between the rich and the poor in “Begadang”,

*Apa artinya malam minggu  
Bagi orang yang tidak mampu  
Mau ke pesta tak beruang  
Akhirnya nongkrong di pinggir jalan . . .  
Bagi mereka yang punya uang  
Berdansa-dansi di night club  
Bagi kita yang tidak punya uang  
Cukup berjoget disini  
Bagi mereka yang punya uang  
Makan-makan di restoran  
Bagi kita yang tak punya uang  
Makannya di warung kopi*

What good is Saturday night  
To people who aren't well off  
We want to have fun but got no money  
End up squatting at the side of the road  
Those who have money  
Go dancing at nightclubs  
We who have no money  
Just dance at the side of the street  
Those who have money  
Eat in big restaurants  
We who have no money  
Eat only at roadside stalls<sup>55)</sup>

Irama's religious transformation had far-reaching influence not only on his personal life and views, but also on his political persuasion. Believing it his sacred duty to support Islam in any way, he and his *Soneta Group* actively endorsed the Islamic alliance, PPP (*Partai Persatuan Perkembangan* — United Development Party), performing for the latter's mass meetings and campaigns in 1977 and 1982. Predictably, his composition produced on cassettes during this time reflected his current concerns about individual and public morality. By then, dangdut's ability to reach a mass audience had made it a powerful political tool as well as potent vehicle for the criticisms of controversial social issues such as human rights,

<i>Hormati hak azasi manusia</i>	Respect basic human rights
<i>Karena itu fitrah manusia</i>	That's the duty of all mankind
<i>Kita semua bebas memilih</i>	We are all free to choose
<i>Jalan hidup yang disukai</i>	How we wish to live
<i>Tuhanpun tidak memaksakan</i>	Even God doesn't force
<i>Apa yang hambaNya lakukan</i>	His subjects to behave in a certain way
 <i>Kebebasan beragama</i>	 Freedom of religion

<i>Itu hak azasi</i>	That's a basic human right
<i>Kebebasan berbicara</i>	Freedom of speech
<i>Itu hak azasi</i>	That's a basic human right
<i>Kita bebas untuk</i>	We are free to do as we wish
<i>Melakukan segala-galanya</i>	As long as we don't conflict
<i>dengan Pancasila</i>	With Pancasila <sup>56)</sup>

Current social issues frequently find their way into Irama's composition as oppositional message that provides opportunities for listeners to hear points of view that contradict the opinions they more commonly receive from institutional sources of information. In "Judi," for instance, Irama conveys his strong opposition to the officially-sponsored lottery, TSSB/DSSB,<sup>57)</sup> which has swept predominantly lower-class Indonesians tantalized by the prospect of instant wealth into a frenzy of betting,

<i>Judi menjanjikan kemenangan</i>	Gambling promises winning
<i>Judi menjanjikan kekayaan</i>	Gambling promises wealth
<i>Bohong, bohong</i>	Lies, lies
<i>Kalaupun kau menang</i>	Even if you win
<i>Itu awal dari kekalahan</i>	It's the beginning of loss
<i>Bohong, bohong</i>	Lies, lies
<i>Kalaupun kau kaya</i>	Even if you become rich
<i>Itu awal dari kemiskinan</i>	It's the beginning of poverty
<i>Judi meracuni kehidupan</i>	Gambling poisons life
<i>Judi meracuni keimanan</i>	Gambling poisons faith <sup>58)</sup>

Songs like these bring issues of morality to the awareness of literally millions of Indonesians. More than a set of musical messages, Irama's dangdut compositions are also responses to particular historical contexts. As a celebrity, Rhoma Irama certainly provides entertainment value but he also functions as a moralizer for the time. This propensity for moralizing finds basis not only in the Islamic belief that life should be a mission to carry out God's commandment but, as Martin Hatch has pointed out, also in the Javanese concept that powerful people have social responsibilities (Hatch 1989: 48). Irama, in taking upon himself this particular role, is conscious of his position as a leader, albeit a musical one, and as such sees it his duty to emphasize issues of human and moral interest in his songs.

Although the above examples are really too few in comparison to Irama's prolific output, they embody his recurrent populist themes and, I believe, they can be representative of Irama's personal views and concerns, at least the ones displayed to the public. Without questioning Irama's intentions which are, in the first place, difficult to ascertain, it is impossible to gloss over the contradictions that lurk behind the veneer of social criticism.

On one level, the songs embody in their content the experiences, values and aspirations of the lower-class which are usually marginalized in official history. In this sense, Frederick may be right in suggesting that Irama's popularity can be attributed

not only to his role, albeit self-proclaimed, as spokesman and defender of the masses, but also to his sensitive understanding of the condition of many non-elite Indonesians. At the same time, the songs celebrate fundamental Islamic values which, in the 70s, constituted some of the most urgent concerns of the Islamic revival that swept through Indonesia. Dangdut provided an altogether unique platform from which to spread Islamic thoughts and values to a large segment of Indonesians and Irama's ability to fuse music and religion deserves to be acknowledged as a major accomplishment and a unique contribution to the Islamic revival at that time.

On another level, however, it takes very little effort to see that behind the anti-hegemonic posture which the songs try to convey, Irama's compositions are, in fact, grounded on hegemonic values in the way they encourage acceptance of the prevailing situation. Furthermore, the songs, with their conscious Islamic message, themselves are carriers of a specific ideological stance whose main objective is proselytization.<sup>59)</sup> At best, many of these songs are used as vehicles to express individual discontent with events rather than in organizing political responses.

For instance, that exhortations such as this, "*Boleh saja kita miskin/kalau itu beri kehormatan/Boleh saja kita lapar/kalau itu demi keimanan*,"<sup>60)</sup> come from someone who has not had the lower-classes' experience of wretched poverty or miserable hunger provide at best cold comfort; at worst, it sounds untrue. By upholding hegemonic ideological patterns, Irama's compositions provide one of the best examples of Gramsci's "hegemonic representations." As such, they do not only reproduce and reinforce hegemonic values but "foster forms of consciousness which accept a position of subordination" (Hall, *et al.*, 1977: 49).

Irama's own cross-class success story encoded in these songs simultaneously encourages and sanctions individual success while obscuring broader patterns of class conflict. On the one hand, it shows him as a hero who has managed to survive very well and beat the system at its own game. As such, it symbolizes for the ordinary people that dreams do come true and, as Irama might insist, only with sheer determination and, perhaps, divine blessing. His semi-autobiographical films imply that not only is it possible to rise to the top of the Indonesian society, but that there is nothing wrong with such an achievement. This rags-to-riches story, however, is fraught with contradictions. On the surface, the story is a straightforward affirmation of the ideology of success and, furthermore, of success as a reward of hard work and virtue. However, success in the ephemeral and highly competitive world of popular music, Hennion argues, depends mainly on the confluence of so many factors, among others, a lucky break, and the convergence of efforts of a creative team who takes over the production of all aspects of the music of which the creation of a star and a keen sense for what holds meaning for the public are crucial variables (Hennion 1983). In other words, success in the entertainment world is, more often than not, the result of economic, sociological, musical, aesthetic and political intervention.

The underlying tension in this rags-to-riches story is the conflict between moral virtues and newly emerging models of success not deserved by virtuous behavior.



Interestingly, Irama's own personal life which has, on a number of times, deviated from the ideal image he presents on screen or on stage exemplifies rather ironically that virtuous behavior has very little to do with success. It does not come as a surprise then if he needed, through his films, to constantly reaffirm the causal connection between virtuous behavior and success.

This contradictory pull in Irama's music owes mainly to the fundamentally ideological nature of cultural forms and to the equally central role he occupies in their production. As an ideological field, dangdut lends itself easily as a space of contestation. This particular aspect of dangdut frames another not unrelated argument popular among educated observers of dangdut that Irama's songs are rooted in a double agenda: to reinforce Islamic values and identity, and to sell his music over as wide a territory as possible. Implied in this argument is the perception that Irama's emphasis on *dakwah*, apart from his religious convictions, has a considerable economic logic. In a predominantly Islamic country, Irama, through his manipulation of symbolic associations, has assured for himself a vast market of captive audiences.

Another widespread opinion is that it would be easier to give Irama's well-meaning intentions the credit they deserve if one could overlook the credibility gap that becomes quite transparent as the discrepancy between his public preaching and private practice widens. Given this opinion, it is not difficult to disbelieve some views that Rhoma Irama's religious convictions are visually encoded in his costumes rather than in his actions.<sup>61)</sup>

#### 4) Performance

One of the most distinctive features of *Soneta* musical style is the element of theater that characterizes this group's live performance. In the beginning, this, too, was largely a reaction to earlier criticisms by rock groups of *irama melayu*'s 'streetside' performance style. Until Rhoma Irama and his *Soneta*, *orkes melayu*'s performance contexts revolved around *kampung* domestic celebrations where their usual performance space may only be a few square feet of cleared-up yard or sides of streets. Although *irama melayu* had by then already consolidated a large following among the non-elite constituents of urban *kampungs*, the individual ensembles had neither the capital to finance large-scale live performances nor the technology to meet the requirements of open-air concerts.

In this sense, *Soneta* can be credited for inaugurating the trend toward large, football field-size live concerts which, until then, were the monopoly of rock music, eventually turning this type of musical activity into a burgeoning music enterprise in present day Indonesia. Spurred on by a desire to transform *irama melayu*'s much-maligned image, Irama started to assemble the visual and sound effects that would enhance the innovations he had already introduced into other aspects of his music. Contrary to his own early specifications that the music he had in mind should not bear the elements of Western influence, Irama, in fact, turned to Western rock band live shows, as he had earlier turned to Western rock instrumentation, for the model he

needed to give his concerts the visual impact he wanted.

Irama, according to Frederick, “infused dynamism into his performances by sheer kinetic drive and visible physical effort” which he frequently enhanced by a hodge-podge of his own personal, if outlandish, interpretation of glitter and glamour which included among others, bizarre stage props and gaudy costumes derivative of Western rock music’s aggressive male iconography: male bodies on display, plunging shirts, and tight trousers in unlikely colors and frills, leather boots with chains and rivets (1982: 112). The perceptual intensity of sound, often amplified to suggest physical tangibility, became an irresistible musical attraction which, Frederick claims, set heterogeneous audiences in both urban and rural areas of Indonesia in a collective celebration of energy and agility.

Another unique aspect of *Soneta* live performances was the introduction, perhaps for the first time, of a type of choreographed synchronized movements by the musicians during performance which added another dimension to the visual effects Irama intended. After Rhoma Irama’s return from pilgrimage, the *Soneta* music began to exhibit a number of visible changes and in the area of performance, one of the most obvious changes was in the stage costumes now dominated by Arabian Nights-inspired Islamic couture. Though the gaudy colors remained, and so did the knee-length boots and the bizarre props, the long hair gave way to shorter, neater hairstyle.

Apart from these new visual effects, the way the entire performance was conducted displayed a strongly Islamic character as Rhoma Irama took to opening his concerts with the Islamic greeting, “*Assalamu’Alaikum*” (“Peace be with you”), and with Koranic passages before every new number. Thus the didactic elements were not only embodied in the songs, they were also openly conveyed in performance. To give this an even dramatic effect, a dry ice machine, formerly an exclusively rock contrivance, continually generated masses of clouds that enveloped the performers, creating visions of other-worldliness.

A *Tempo* account of Irama’s New Year concert in 1977 might be illuminating at this point. What made this concert rather significant was that it featured two rival musical genres: rock and dangdut. Billed as a musical duel, it starred the two most popular figures of the Indonesian popular music scene: Albar and his *God Bless* rock band, and Rhoma Irama and his *Soneta Group*. *Tempo*’s account describes a little drama that opened this concert at Istora Senayan on New Year’s eve. After the gong marking the start of the concert sounded, both Irama and Albar appeared on stage, each carrying a white dove which they simultaneously released to the deafening applause of the huge crowd. This was soon followed by the tossing of coin in full view of the public to determine who was going to perform first. Albar’s group took the lead and with powerful acoustical equipment of 4,000 watts began playing many of its own rock hits as well as its version of current Western hits. Although the audiences were reportedly appropriately responsive, voices telling Albar to get off the stage were said to have occasionally risen above the din.<sup>62)</sup>

A comedy team provided the intermission number but it, too, was hurried off the

stage by impatient dangdut fans who screamed for Irama's appearance. Against *God Bless*' 4,000 watts amplification system, *Soneta* appeared with 6,000 watts. According to this report, Irama only had to wave his hand for audiences to respond raucously, or recite a few Koranic verses to still the crowd to attention. As soon as they started playing, the audience area, *Tempo* claims, transformed into a sea of undulating bodies. The peculiar character of rock and dangdut, according to this report, was both established and reflected by the equally unique nature of audience response. While rock music was supposed to have inspired applause, dangdut compelled bodily reaction which sent audiences dancing to its irresistible rhythms.

As this live performance illustrated, the aesthetic experiences provided not only visual or aural but also sensual pleasures of the body that the act of dancing allowed. One of the musical attributes of dangdut that has aided its popularity is its use as dance music. Even in its early stages, it was associated with a restrained type of social dancing, known as *joget*, slow rhythmic undulations of the hips and shoulders accompanied by delicate movements of the legs. When mass public dancing at festivals and fairs had become possible in New Order Indonesia, dangdut became the popular musical accompaniment. In a conservative Islamic society, dangdut performance contexts provide alternative "ritual" space which encourages and allows some degree of spontaneity and sensuality (Bocock 1974).

The *Soneta* performances owe their popularity to an ingenious combination of multiple sensory modes — verbal, musical, choreographic, visual-aesthetic dimensions — which form the components of the total message and sensually texture audience response. As a competent performer, Irama is valued for his ability to fuse local tradition with Western technology in a syncretic blend that embodies and articulates the values and self-images of dangdut's varied audiences. No other Indonesian musician has ever tried to create a social image which corresponds to his actual area of consumption, the lower class, as fully and as closely as Irama and this may explain his popular appeal.

Another factor behind the popularity of *Soneta* performances, as well as most dangdut live concerts in general, may be related to what Blacking describes as "the music's power to create another world of virtual time" as opposed to the world of actual time which circumscribes ordinary daily experiences (Blacking 1973: 26–27 in Waterman 1990: 215). Speaking of *juju* musicians, Waterman contends that "the ability of competent musicians to establish a special flow of lived time," determines a successful *juju* performance (1990: 215). In a similar way, Frith talks about the music's ability to organize the audience's sense of time and intensify their experiences of the present with the use of beat, pulse and rhythm (Frith 1987: 147).

At dangdut concerts, the irresistible *gendang* beats that punctuate the string and flute interludes compel bodily involvement in a setting defined by the time scale of music. This, along with the spectacle, the dancing, the sensory stimulation, provide socially marginalized audiences an aesthetically mediated pleasure. The *Soneta* performances function as an inexpensive "liminoid" (Turner 1974) resource, a form of

“aesthetic ritual,” to borrow Bocock’s phrase, providing aesthetic experience to its multitude of following (Bocock 1974: 145).

The ultimate social significance of the *Soneta* performances can only be understood in the context of the institutionally arranged interaction between Irama and his audience, an enormous heterogeneous public. The behavior of audiences at live concerts illustrates another aspect of cultural production, that is, as a site of contestation. Despite the hegemonic tendencies in dangdut and, despite Irama’s didactic intentions, dangdut is first and foremost a matter of amusement and entertainment and, therefore, its reception and social meaning are undeniably connected with fun and entertainment (Frith 1978; Grossberg 1987). Thus Irama’s flamboyant theatrics and the celebration of exaggeration and excess are inextricably part of dangdut’s entertainment value and audiences respond to these accordingly as a source of pleasure. This brings up the cultural studies argument which stresses that the explicit aims and intentions of music makers are less significant than the meanings read into their sounds by their consumers (Frith 1989). This point of view sees audiences not as passive recipients, but active “decoders” of meanings (Fiske 1987). In the Indonesian popular music scene, audience behavior at live concerts provides ample evidence of the way the public may read meaning into a music quite apart from and, frequently, despite the intention of musicians like Irama.

Perhaps the most dramatic example is the way audiences reappropriate dangdut as music rather than as ‘performed moral lesson’. The question why audiences respond raucously even to the most religious of Irama’s compositions leads us back to the nature of cultural forms as a plane of contestation where, on the one hand, hegemonic representations, like dangdut music, try to beguile audiences into “spontaneous” consent, and where, on the other hand, audiences try to resist such attempts (Hall, *et al.*, 1977: 49). The huge attendance that characterizes Irama’s live performances suggests, on the one hand, the power of dangdut music to satisfy certain needs which the audience may have, among others, the need for amusement and entertainment. But this power remains only a potential for whatever quality of dangdut to provide “a special enhancement of experience” ultimately depends on the competence of the performer to bring it out.

In this sense, Irama, more than any other popular entertainment figure in Indonesia, approximates Bauman’s description of an exemplary performer as one with the power “to elicit the participative attention and energy of his audiences” (Bauman 1984: 43). According to Bauman, the enhancement of experience that binds heterogeneous audiences to the performance confers on the performer a measure of prestige, “prestige because of the demonstrated competence he has displayed, control because the determination of the flow of the interaction is in his hands” (1984: 44). Irama’s competence as a performer is exemplified by his ability to forge “communities of taste” (Waterman 1990: 9) out of disparate audiences. At live dangdut concerts, the element of ‘oneness’ and solidarity that links together these “communities of taste”<sup>63</sup> frequently generates “spontaneous communitas” (Turner 1977).

Writing about rituals in industrial society, Bocock points out the tendency in people to seek another dimension to their existence apart from the utilitarian basis of quotidian concerns once, he claims, “the economy is capable of yielding an acceptable standard of living for them” (1974: 21). According to him, ‘pop,’ among other cultural forms, provides this dimension by “providing drama through identification with ‘stars’ in the entertainment world” (1974: 21). Bocock’s argument, while true, is rather limited when seen in the context of less affluent societies like Indonesia, particularly in relation to dangdut and its many underprivileged fans who, despite a far from ideal economic situation, have as much, perhaps even more urgent, need for this other “dimension” that the circumstances of their everyday lives deny them.

An important aspect of Bocock’s argument that is significant in understanding Irama’s superstar status is the notion of “identification with stars” in popular culture. Popular culture’s cultivation of the “star system” transforms performers into individual objects in which, according to Martin, “that impersonal and collective charisma is focused” (Martin 1981: 155). From the point of view of the industry, the “star system” has obvious economic dimension, a point which is, however, frequently lost on the fans whose interests are in creating larger-than-life figures or “living metaphors” who can incarnate their dreams and aspirations (Martin 1981: 155). It is to the credit of Irama’s competence that he can also read through the needs of his audiences. He does not only show concern for the masses, or fight on their behalf, but identifies with them as one who rose among the same ranks, in the process providing them with a model to emulate and a source of vicarious satisfaction.

Stardom, however, is complexly rooted in a paradox. On the one hand, the promotion of personality cults around the star’s life-style, fashion, or private life creates around him an aura of glamour and fantasy. On the other hand, celebrity status also distances him from the public: he becomes at once both hugely familiar and untouchable. In the Indonesian entertainment scene, few figures understand this so well as Irama. Since charisma can be maintained only by a right balance of tension between availability and unreachability, Irama’s own efforts at maintaining his charisma by a combination of high spectacularity in his performances and remoteness in his private activities are indeed remarkable. This is perhaps pushing the point too far, but I am inclined to believe that his *dakwah* activities may be Irama’s attempt to maintain the charisma he is losing as a musical figure. In the end, *dakwah* might be the only respectable way out for an ageing superstar to exit from fame with grace and it is, like any of Irama’s previous moves, equally calculated.<sup>64)</sup> In the highly competitive world of entertainment where pop stars come and go with pop trends, and fans are fickle, *dakwah* will always have a faithful audience.<sup>65)</sup>

Hegemonic values are not only reproduced and reinforced in Irama’s compositions, they are also entrenched in the performance styles of *Soneta Group*. In his study of *juju* music, Waterman describes the *juju* style as a metaphor of social order in which its various realms of sensory modes — visual, aural, verbal and nonverbal dimensions — are symbolic replications of hierarchical structuring of West African

society (Waterman 1990: 218). This notion of music as a metaphor of social order is also evident in the practices of the *Soneta Group*. Despite Irama's emphasis on equality, in fact, frequently invoking the *Koran* for that purpose, the *Soneta* performance style dramatically embodies the hierarchical structure that prevails in the Indonesian social order, a paradoxical situation that casts doubts on the credibility of Irama's personal convictions. Visually encoded in the performance set-up are the social distinctions that separate Irama from his musicians. These social distinctions are articulated in the costume as well as in the spatial relationships. Irama is at the center of this performance and his eminent position in this hierarchy is signified by where he stands in front of the stage and by what he wears, always sartorially different from his musicians' attire.

These visual codes of status in the *Soneta* performance format are further reinforced by Irama's musical role as vocalist and lead guitarist which gives him plenty of opportunity for solo display of his musical skills. As a support team, the *Soneta* musicians cluster around Irama, providing him both musical and visual backdrop. On the verbal level of the performance, Irama also takes over all the parts which include the Islamic opening greetings, the Koranic verses and didactic messages which introduce each song number, and the small repartees with the audience. Apart from providing the chorus numbers, and playing their instruments, the *Soneta* musicians are ubiquitous, visible, but mute. The same situation characterizes the off-performance behavior of the *Soneta Group*. As far as I know, no interview of any other member of this Group has been conducted. Except that they are all Haji, little is known of these musicians.<sup>66)</sup>

Frederick claims that the popularity of the *Soneta* style during this time could be seen in the "explosion of dangdut fashions in the wake of the *Soneta* innovations: tiger-print velvet slacks, silver lame bell-bottomed trousers, calf-length white leather boots with brass heels and toe guards, and ultimately an eye-popping romantic, Arabian Nights-like Islamic couture (*busana Islam*)" (1982: 112). One of the results of this, Frederick contends, has been the vogue of "Islamic boutique" fashions and the pilgrimage to Mecca by pop stars, although I am inclined to believe these were direct results of the Islamic revival that has spread throughout the Muslim world in the last two decades.

Granting, on the other hand, that Irama might indeed have influenced the pilgrimage of pop stars, I have, however, been hard-pressed to find any evidence or even traces of the "explosion" of *Soneta* fashion except a few dangdut stars who openly imitated Rhoma Irama's style, in particular, Nano Romanza and Mara Karma. These Irama look-alikes have by now descended into obscurity and have only photographs to show for their earlier involvement. Since the idea of a "fashion explosion" suggests a trend of a nationwide, or even just a *kampung* wide or city wide scale, surely two or ten *Soneta* imitators cannot be said to represent an entire community; nor can their idiosyncratic imitation be considered a popular vogue.

My point is that, although the *Soneta* fashion may have been adored by its fans, it



remained basically a stage costume, and was part of the special atmosphere of performance. Neither did the fans, who saw the incongruity of its use apart from its performance setting, try to appropriate it for street attire, work clothes, or even special occasion apparel. Unlike, for instance, jeans, Arabian cloaks or knee-length boots were simply out of place at bus terminals, train stations, markets, construction sites, or similar occupational contexts where a majority of Rhoma Irama's most avid supporters may be found. Furthermore, even if it were not contextually anomalous, the cost of acquiring the *Soneta*-inspired fashion would have been beyond the reach of many *kampung* youths, anyway. Dangdut fans in Java whom I have had the opportunity to watch at a variety of contexts are not distinguishable by any visible signifying style like clothes, hairstyle, or ideological stance.

Similarly, I have had the chance to visit the Islamic boutiques that specialize in women's fashion, many of them at large department stores in Jakarta. Even if Rhoma Irama may have inspired this idea, nothing even vaguely resembling a *Soneta* cut, frill or button could be found in these places whose main suppliers, well-known Jakarta designers, will not be caught dead in a tiger-print outfit. Even allowing for the lapse of ten years when Frederick made this observation, and the ephemeral nature of fashion itself, it would still be difficult to imagine that a "*Soneta* fashion explosion," of a scale implied by this phrase, could have taken place, although, I am sure, Rhoma Irama would rather believe it did. What is closer to the truth, however, is the tendency among lesser dangdut stars, notably, the non-recording female stage performers, to copy, using cheaper materials, the often flashy designer stage attire of superstars like Elvy Sukaesih or Camelia Malik.<sup>67)</sup>

At the height of his live performance successes, Rhoma Irama started heading for the cinema. The spatial limitation presented by the stage, as it were, had become too confining and too small for Irama's exaggerated gestural, mimical, and facial expressions to be appreciated by a stadium-size audience. The film medium presented the best way of overcoming this limitation with the ability of the camera to focus, for instance, on his expressions of suffering. In addition, the technology of film has, not only the potential for reaching a much larger audience than a live show can accommodate, but also the capacity to overcome the ephemerality of live performances. But if there is anything about Rhoma Irama that is best demonstrated by this decision to head for the cinema, it is his business acumen, for films were then beginning to be big business. Consequently, as Frederick points out, there was a considerable economic logic to the move towards films.

The release in 1976 of the first Rhoma Irama film entitled, *Penasaran*, was followed soon after by a series of similar films, and by 1987, about twenty had become familiar to the public. The narrative plots of these films center on Rhoma Irama's romanticised biography, specifically, the succession of difficulties which he had all managed to triumph over through personal virtue and hard work. What is more, these films had Irama playing himself in the central role. There is no place in this paper to discuss Irama's films, but suffice to say that these, more than his recordings, guaran-

teed Irama not only the financial independence he had been aiming at, but the wealth, the fame and the popularity he perhaps never even dreamt possible at the start.

Irama has, to date, produced and starred in about twenty of his own films, mostly box-office successes. I have so far seen only a few on video, and the issues they raise are vast and need a separate study. It might be worth noting here, however, that Irama's films have never been shown on first-run cinemas because their producers feared that their cool reception at these places, and the negative criticisms they will invite from patrons of these more affluent venues will affect the films' popularity among the general public. Such films, however, ruled all the second-class movie houses all over Indonesia, and those produced in the 70s were, undisputably, huge commercial successes, conferring on Irama the distinction of being the highest paid actor of his time.<sup>68)</sup> The 1980s production, however, could not repeat the earlier successes and there are suggestions that either people have tired of the same clichéd plots or the 80s generation of fans have different needs and aspirations. Another opinion is that Irama, himself, has now grown too old for the kind of roles he used to play and could no longer lend credibility to them. Similarly, his script writers are rumored now to be at pains to come up with plots appropriate for an ageing superstar without turning him into a cliché as well.

### **Dangdut Music and Indonesian Society in the 1970s**

One of the principal conclusions that Frederick makes in his article is that "there is clearly something about the dangdut style, either ideological nor entirely natural, that belongs to its time and circumstance" (1982: 128). By this he suggests that the 70s decade which spawned popular mass-mediated cultural forms owed much of its great vitality to the peculiar political atmosphere of New Order Indonesia. Unlike the Guided Democracy of the Sukarno era, the 1970s New Order period was marked by a commercial drive whose resulting competition generated, in Foulcher's phrase, "a consumerist-based culture of international capitalism" (1989: 3) which provided the context for the development, among others, of pop music forms such as dangdut. The entry of mass media technology along with this culture was instrumental in the rise of new ways of production, reproduction, dissemination and consumption of these new cultural products. Frederick further argues that the basic pop norms and values that underlie dangdut's own development — the western influences, the dancing, the personality cult of media stardom, the Islamic content as well as the individualist message — products of a political climate far more open to foreign influences, had no chance of either being developed or tolerated by the ideological climate of Sukarno's Guided Democracy (1989).

In retrospect, the emergence of dangdut as a new musical genre cannot be understood merely as part of a broadly-based musical changes then going on in Indonesian music. The inevitable mutation of dangdut form, and indeed of any form of popular music, is largely determined by the nature of the social milieu which fosters it and the whole society that sustains it. Frederick contends that the early stages of dangdut's

development coincided with the emergence of a psychological readiness on the part of the population to accept this music and develop it further (Frederick 1982). At least three factors framed the emergence of this psychological readiness which, in turn, provided dangdut the impetus for further development: politics, urbanization and the mass media.

### 1) Dangdut and Politics

Frederick points out that one of the direct contributions of the New Order government to the development of Indonesian popular music was the easing of restrictions of foreign musical imports after 1965 which allowed a variety of both musical styles and musical instruments to come into the country (Frederick 1982). The presence of these foreign influences encouraged the musical experimentation that resulted in the emergence of modernized musical genres which combine both indigenous as well as foreign musical influences. These innovations, however, have not always been viewed kindly by those who believe that accommodation to Western influence meant the loss of some genuine, indigenous identity. This assumption usually underlies much of the criticism of dangdut music.

A prominent Indonesian musicologist and businessman, Jaya Suprana, for instance, likens Rhoma Irama's dangdut variant with its rock influences to a skyscraper, that is, modern, sophisticated, but artificial. The implication is that Irama's technological innovation has debased the authentic appeal of traditional *irama melayu* tunes defined as *tulus* (lit. sincere), *luhur* (lit. sublime), and *polos* (lit. plain).<sup>69</sup> It should be remembered that these were exactly the qualities that earned for *irama melayu* its lower-class image in the 70s. Opinions like this represent a predominantly elitist perception that modern forms such as dangdut are trivialization and manipulation of vibrant, authentic forms. This sort of attitude fails to understand the dynamic processes of historical change and the new social and economic relations that accompany such change.

However, what Frederick considers the most amazing contribution of the New Order political situation to the growth of dangdut during its early stage was its astounding disinterest in pop culture affairs which the government did not deem worthy of serious consideration. Mercifully spared the baneful effects of direct political intervention, dangdut found much room to flourish and become a modern form that best expresses, Frederick claims, the elusive "*wajah Indonesia*." Not without a touch of irony, dangdut has consequently enjoyed the advantages of its supposed aesthetic backwardness.

### 2) Dangdut and Urbanization

Ethnomusicologists (Coplan 1982; Manuel 1988) have variously pointed out the relation of urbanization to the development of popular music, particularly in the developing world. Such studies have shown that emerging musical styles are both the product and a response to qualitative and quantitative social changes generated by the

socio-economic transformations in new urban societies. These socio-economic transformations are generally manifested by a new economic system based on wage labor and money economy. In social relationships, the socio-economic unit has moved away from the village and extended family to the individual or nuclear family (Manuel 1988: 16).

The economic and social opportunities that come with urbanization and modernization often attract great waves of migration from the countryside as well as from other islands into urban areas. While urbanization may bring about prosperity to many, it can also create such problems as alienation, exploitation and impoverishment to an even greater number. Within this new environment, the creation of a new social identity, Manuel claims, is of crucial significance for survival. Popular music, according to Manuel and Coplan, provides one of the ways of negotiating survival and adaptation, becoming eventually one of the powerful and meaningful symbols of social identity.

The 1970s which framed dangdut's development was a time of rapid urbanization and modernization in Indonesia. Dangdut's growth as popular urban music has been, in the main, facilitated by the radical social and political changes after 1965 and its popularity has been suggested by Frederick as largely attributed to its function in mediating, forming, and expressing a new sense of social identity for an Indonesian population caught up in the process of urbanization and modernization. Its use of contemporary Indonesian as medium of expression has been cited as the agent for unifying the diversely multi-lingual and multi-ethnic backgrounds of its multitude of following. Although dangdut is only one of the popular music genres constituting the present musical landscape, its current popular appeal has been ascribed, among others, to the way its egalitarian social image corresponds to the social position of its consumers.

### 3) Dangdut and the Mass Media

The impact of mass media in the growth of acculturated popular music in Indonesia cannot be underestimated for the development of such pop music forms as dangdut music cannot be fully understood independent of the contributions of mass media technology, specifically the radio, TV, cassette, and cinema (Frederick 1982: 124). In particular, the establishment and success of the Indonesian cassette industry has been largely responsible for the phenomenal growth of dangdut music: it made technically, economically and socially possible the mass production of dangdut music and its reception by a large heterogeneous audiences throughout Indonesia (Frederick 1982: 123; Hatch 1989: 51–53).

In general, the impact of this technology upon musical life has been considerable and varied. For dangdut, in particular, it has not only contributed to its emergence as a syncretic style, but has extended its appeal across a geographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse public thus playing a major role in its popularity. On the socio-economic level, the cassette boom in Indonesia witnessed the emergence of powerful

Chinese entrepreneurs who control the organizational structure of musical production but have shown, according to Manuel, a more accommodating response to diverse class and tastes (1988).

In the early 70s, state-controlled radio stations played an important, albeit limited,<sup>70)</sup> role in disseminating dangdut even to remote towns and villages in Indonesia where portable radios started to be found in large numbers. This limited air time, nevertheless, gave dangdut the opportunity to be heard by a growing number of listeners, inevitably creating a taste in public for this music. When dangdut was finally allowed into television in the late 70s, the added advantage of visual effects greatly enhanced dangdut's popularity, prompting observers to call 1979 "*tahun* dangdut" (dangdut year).<sup>71)</sup> That same year not only saw dangdut's entry into television but also inaugurated dangdut's predominance in nearly all TV-RI's (TV-Republik Indonesia, the State-owned TV station) music programs, eventually clinching in the mid-80s a secure 70% air time of five major musical programs of Indonesia's national television. Apart from the growth of a much wider dangdut following, another positive result of dangdut's TV exposure was the music's growing acceptance among the middle class audience.<sup>72)</sup>

The mass media technology also has a considerable impact on the aesthetic aspect of musical production. From the aesthetic level, musical production has ceased to be the product of the creativity of one prominent individual but the result of many individuals acting cooperatively. Hennion call this cooperative endeavour the "creative collective," a team of professionals who takes over all the aspects of a popular songs production (musician-composers/sound mixer-recording technicians/sound marketers-producers) such as artistic personality, musical know-how, knowledge of the public and market, technical production and musical execution (Hennion 1983).

Mass media technology has also given way to the emergence of new criteria for musician status based, not only on the number of recordings but, specifically, on the number of hit recordings. The nature of live performance has also been transformed. With the reproduction functioning as the original, live performances are measured against the recording, rendering live performing musicians in a 'recreative' rather than creative role (Wicke 1982). This role of the musician has been further overshadowed by the cultivation within the music industry of the star system<sup>73)</sup> which focuses mainly on the singer, in particular, the recording singer. This focus on the singer, although neither new nor exclusive to dangdut, started the personality cult of media stardom that would popularize the concept of "superstar".

On the whole, the first decade of dangdut's development is perhaps one of the liveliest in the history of popular music in Indonesia. From a historical perspective, its growth was political and dialectical in a broad sense. Its rise to the top of the pop music hierarchy was marked by a struggle challenging dominant pop genres such as rock and pop. It co-opted new as well as western forms, reformulated to become a distinctive new form, and replaced its direct antecedent, *irama melayu*, in popularity. As it gradually becomes entrenched, it is continually challenged in turn not only by

other competing pop forms but by its own practitioners. The ultimate source of this constant struggle for change lies in the creative productivity of local musicians whose work is influenced not only by the activities of the recording industry, global pop norms and values, but also by the social forces that shape the musicians' creative environments, among others, the inter-active relationships among musicians, audiences and the layers of social context within which they live.

### **Dangdut 1982–1992**

Despite the many criticisms of its style and the equally numerous predictions of its demise, dangdut, by the end of the 70s, has not only emerged as a distinct new music genre but has successfully established itself at the top of the contemporary pop music hierarchy. In this mood, dangdut entered the 80s. One of the most significant developments of this decade that would play an instrumental role in gradually changing the status of dangdut was the 1982 publication of Frederick's article on dangdut and Rhoma Irama. As the first and only international publication on the subject, Frederick's article provided dangdut with a more favorable image and helped to change the negative attitudes of the public.

What Frederick himself may not even have anticipated or realized at that time is the extent to which his analysis of dangdut would lend legitimacy on this then mainly marginal music and pave the way for its eventual mainstream appropriation. The mass media which, until then, paid little if not hostile attention to this music, as it were, found inspiration from this Western academic's endorsement of dangdut and began to devote pages after pages of articles on this music and conduct series of interviews of its artists. Perhaps the most significant contribution of Frederick's article to this music was in changing much of the negative attitude of the media, and through the media, of the wider public. For one of the immediate results of media intervention was not only to bring dangdut to the attention of the Indonesian population, but by giving it a favorable publicity, also conferred on it a measure of prestige.

There is no established popular music press in Indonesia but most newspapers and magazines contain sections devoted to reviews of and reports on popular music and popular music stars.<sup>74)</sup> After the publication of Frederick's article in 1982, however, there followed a proliferation of writings on dangdut and dangdut stars in these magazines and newspapers. Two tendencies characterize the journalistic cover of this music. First, it is concerned with almost everything around the music — from the private and social life of performers to rumors about their talent fees, or number of cassettes sold — but rarely about the music itself. Very little of these writings may be considered competent music reviews with the majority tending to be merely descriptive, shallow, superficial, and inclined towards the sensational and the gossipy.

The second obvious tendency reflected in the content of these writings on dangdut these last ten years is not only the frequency with which these writings allude to Frederick's article like a binding referent, but the degree with which they seem to echo Frederick's findings to the point that they read more like Indonesian translations



of the original article. What is even more remarkable is the way this article has been turned into a kind of dangdut 'bible' by the seemingly unanimously uncritical acceptance of it by those who write about dangdut, those who are involved with dangdut, and even by those intellectual groups who normally observe the trends in the cultural landscape of Indonesia.<sup>75)</sup> Despite the deluge of materials that regularly flows from the dangdut press, one would still be hard pressed to find one that disagrees, takes an opposite stance, or criticizes Frederick's analysis. What is more fascinating is the way Rhoma Irama, himself the subject of Frederick's article, seems now to have modelled his thoughts after those of Frederick's interpretations of him.

At this stage of its development, a Western academic's endorsement of dangdut was all that the music needed not only to clinch its position at the top of the pop music hierarchy and legitimize its status in mainstream culture, but also to win recognition from the intellectual class which until then had remained largely aloof. In helping dangdut to accomplish this goal, Frederick's contribution to the music cannot be underestimated.

By the 1980s, dangdut had already developed as a distinctive pop music genre. The three factors: politics, urbanization, and the mass media, which have played a major part in the phenomenal growth of dangdut in the 70s, have continued in the 80s to exert a vital role in establishing dangdut at the top of the pop music hierarchy.

### 1) Dangdut and Politics

One of Frederick's concerns about the 70s New Order policy towards pop culture forms was that "while the government has allowed popular culture to flourish unattended, it has also remained relatively ignorant of what its significance may be" (1982: 130). The same can no longer be said of the governments' cultural policy in the 80s. One of the most significant developments in politics in this decade has been the change in the New Order's attitude towards dangdut from one of disregard to a recognition of the music's significance not so much as a legitimate aesthetic form as a potent political tool. This kind of attitude is demonstrated, on the one hand, by the authorities' continuing vacillation between censoring and supporting dangdut and, on the other hand, by actively utilizing dangdut music and musicians at Golkar government political party campaigns.

This latter trend has not gone unnoticed among the circle of dangdut observers who see in the practice of Eddy Sud, concurrently member of the Parliament and executive director of dangdut TV programs, *Aneka Ria Safari* and *Aneka Ria Safari Nusantara*, of soliciting the participation of Safari dangdut performers (*artis-artis Safari*) at Golkar campaigns as a form of 'politicizing' dangdut ("mengGolkarkan" dangdut)<sup>76)</sup> Golkar, for its part, realizing dangdut's popular appeal across a wide spectrum of Indonesian population, has not only appropriated dangdut into its campaign format, but has offered active support in terms of monetary contributions to the dangdut organization, *PAMMI*, *Persatuan Artis-Artis Musik Melayn* and its activities.<sup>77)</sup> At the same time, it has involved itself in actively promoting the music. This involvement is

exemplified by the then Vice-Governor and Jakarta Golkar chairman, Basofi Sudirman's, entry into the roster of dangdut recording stars. Given dangdut's vast popularity, Golkar's use of the music as an instrument for political mobilization is a shrewd and calculated move indeed.

## 2) Dangdut and Urbanization

The economic expansion and urbanization that began in the 70s continue up to the present to attract migration toward urban centers like Jakarta of a diversely multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural population. As in the 70s, this process has resulted in the prosperity of many. It has, however, also spawned the attendant economic, social, and cultural problems among an even larger segment of the population who had neither the skill nor the educational qualifications which could help them assimilate into the new economic and social structure. For many, impoverishment, compounded by a sense of alienation, has become the norm. Ethnomusicologists Coplan (1982) and Manuel (1988) who have followed the effects of urbanization in the developing world have noted the immense importance in such environments of the creation of a new social identity as a way of negotiating survival. Their studies have underlined the crucial role of popular music as a powerful symbol of social identity.

In the 70s, dangdut music's populist appeal, egalitarian character, its use of contemporary Indonesian, and its theme and lyrics that portrayed the lives and experiences of the lower-class played just such a role, creating a community out of ethnically, linguistically, and culturally disparate groups. In the 80s, aided by the entry of more sophisticated media technology which can disseminate the music even to the most remote regions of the country, dangdut has become both a symbol of social and national identity.

## 3) Dangdut and the Mass Media

While the 70s ushered in the entry of sophisticated media technology into the country, the 80s has been marked not only by the growing sophistication of such technology but also by the increasing utilization of such technology in musical experimentation, musical production, reproduction and dissemination. As the 70s has shown, the arrival of media technology into the country was also accompanied by the introduction of Western musical styles, in particular, rock and pop, global pop norms and values. By the 80s, these influences have become entrenched with new ones continually being introduced. In dangdut music, specifically, these influences have manifested their impact in many different ways.

First, in the area of musical production, the growing sophistication of musical technology has encouraged musical experimentation which produced technologically slick sounds combining the original *irama melayu* melody with the stylistic features not just of rock but of other Western pop forms such as reggae and rapping. This particular dangdut style is exemplified by the music of Fahmy Shahab in collabora-

tion with a Japanese recording firm which also recorded the album, *Kopi Dangdut*, on CD, and handled its marketing in Japan. This new style illustrates the prominent Indonesian musicologist, Suka Hardjana's, metaphor of dangdut as a naked girl ready to be dressed in whatever style.<sup>78)</sup> Although this proved to many observers the stylistic versatility of dangdut, *Kopi Dangdut* only had limited, and rather brief, success among dangdut fans whose initial interest on it owed largely to its novelty. The widespread opinion was that most dangdut fans could not quite relate to the 'alien' beat of the music. Partly, or perhaps mainly, disillusioning many dangdut fans towards this music was the media exposé of the album as a plagiarized version, in Indonesian, of a purportedly original composition by a Spanish song-writer.<sup>79)</sup>

I am inclined to believe, however, that this particular audience response may also be due to the fact that dangdut fans, besides not being attuned to the reggae-rapping styles, are also unaware of the cultural significance reggae has to the Rastafarians' sense of exile from their homeland or of rapping to the black youths' sense of exclusion from a predominantly white world. As such, dangdut fans find the music not only 'foreign' to their ears but also to their experience. This audience response has been attributed by many observers to the maturing and increasingly discriminating taste of dangdut following in the 80s.

Second, the interest of the media on dangdut, in particular, the television media has been mutually beneficial to both TV-RI and to the development of the music. The growing popularity of dangdut presented to the television management a lucrative source of revenues. At the same time, television's involvement with dangdut assured the music a wide coverage across the archipelago. Apart from the economic dimension, this collaboration has also a significant impact on the aesthetic aspect of the music as it presented the challenge not only for the creation of more artistic compositions but also of the performances of such compositions. Although dangdut began appearing on TV programs as early as 1976, it had limited coverage for most of that decade. In the 80s, however, the collaboration between dangdut and the television has given rise to five musical programs, *Aneka Ria Safari*, *Aneka Ria Safari Nusantara*, *Kamera Ria*, *Irama Masa Kini*, and *Album Minggu* devoted mainly to dangdut releases. By the end of the 80s, dangdut music has managed to occupy nearly 70 percent of TV airtime in these programs.

Third, apart from their economic and aesthetic impacts, these TV programs have far-reaching effects on dangdut. The TV exposure also granted dangdut a measure of prestige and paved the way for the music's acceptance by the middle-class audience. At the same time, it facilitated dangdut's entry into more upper-class performance venues such as exclusive nightspots and elite disco houses, private parties of the affluent, as well as major civic celebrations. By the end of the 80s, dangdut has successfully spread its popularity beyond the slummy surroundings of backstreets, brothels, and poor *kampung* celebrations towards more prestigious venues and occasions, eventually inaugurating the trend for live music concerts that have since become a booming business in the area of popular entertainment in present-day Indonesia.

Fourth, the pervasive influence of sophisticated musical technology has created not only more sophisticated dangdut compositions but has also given rise to a number of young performers, predominantly female and beautiful. As in the 70s, musical production has remained virtually a male-dominated domain. Performance, however, has become the space in which women clearly predominate in a variety of musical contexts. Unlike the 70s, no major musical figure comparable in stature to Rhoma Irama has emerged in the 80s. Instead, a large number of 'lesser stars' grace the decade whose major contribution to dangdut is more in the area of popularizing the music rather than in introducing creative innovations. While Rhoma Irama and Elvy Sukaiseh practically had to crawl their way to the top of the pop music hierarchy in the 70s, many performers in the 80s are overnight successes. Furthermore, they earn much more than either Irama or Elvy at an equivalent stage of their musical careers. Curiously though, such overnight successes, unlike the enduring appeal of Irama and Elvy, have frequently transient appeal; their popularity comes and goes with pop trends.

Fifth, a related by-product of modern musical technology is the emergence of a set of musical criteria judging musical status of performers according to who has and has not made any recordings. By the mid-eighties, this practice became even more defined as the dangdut 'prestige structures' began focusing not just on any recording, but on hit recordings, and moreover, on the number of hit recordings. Thus, within the present dangdut 'prestige structures', the dangdut hierarchy consists, on the one hand, of the recording artists who constitute the elite group and, on the other, of a large number of non-recording stage performers or *penyanyi panggung* who make-up the lower rung of this hierarchy.

## Conclusion

If any conclusions can be made about the present state of dangdut music they are: firstly, it has by the end of the 80s managed to penetrate even the remotest part of the country, due mainly to the print, radio and television media. Secondly, dangdut is currently not just a popular music but a big-time business enterprise both in the area of live entertainment as well as in recording. Despite the rise and fall in market trends, dangdut, more than any other pop music, has shown a remarkably steady growth drawing not just performers from other genres, but recording companies as well who see in it a potential gold mine. Thirdly, despite the criticisms by many dangdut observers that the music's sometimes indiscriminate appropriation of Western musical influences has resulted in the loss of its original character, dangdut is proving itself to be a musically versatile music. This quality, I believe, is a measure of its own vitality and enduring appeal. Fourth, as a site of contestation, dangdut will remain the arena in which economic, political, cultural and aesthetic forces will be in constant struggle for control over its production, meaning and market.

## Notes

- 1) “Dua puluh tahun yang lalu, dangdut belum bisa main di gedung. Ia cuma bisa dimainkan di pinggir kampung, dan dinikmati orang-orang yang memakai sarung. Dulu, penyanyi yang berhak naik mobil hanya yang di jalur pop. Penyanyi dangdut, biar top, tetap naik opelet. Dulu, yang berhak beli rumah hanya penyanyi pop. Penyanyi dangdut cuma kontrak di kampung-kampung. Dulu, penyanyi dangdut cuma bisa nyanyi di pesta kawin, hajatan sunatan. Sekarang, penyanyidangdut juga bisa naik mobil, beli rumah, dan manggung di Balai Sidang” (translation mine). In “Dangdut Kini Main di Gedung,” *Pelita Minggu*, 5 May 1991; “Selingan: Goyang Dangdut,” *Tempo*, 25 May 1991.
- 2) William Frederick (1982), “Rhoma Irama and the *Dangdut* Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture,” in *Indonesia*, 34: 103–130.
- 3) From text of interview with prominent Indonesian psychologist and University of Indonesia academic, Dr. Iman Santoso Sukardi, by *Tempo*, 8 May 1991. Dr. Sukardi categorized the dangdut phenomenon, along with rock and related fashion trends like the miniskirt or the punk look, as a fad. He defined fad as the tendency of certain groups in society to like or prefer something that is currently ‘in’ or popular (“*Fad adalah tingkah laku dari kelompok masyarakat yang menyukai suatu bentuk yang sedang populer, sedang ‘in’*”). Central in this definition is the element of currency as the essence of fad. On the basis of this definition, I find it hard to accept that something that has been around for the last twenty years, as dangdut has been, and not only remains popular, but continues to grow in popularity, as dangdut does, can be labelled a fad. To use this definition to refer to dangdut is, at the very least, a contradiction in terms, but what is even more amazing is how Dr. Sukardi himself could have missed the contradictory implications of his own claims.
- 4) A prominent academic and sociologist who has done work on urban vagrants in Jakarta declined to be interviewed, refusing to discuss dangdut partly because he did not like the music, and mainly because, according to him, dangdut is associated with prostitutes. Obviously, the question of personal taste is involved here, but I found this reaction a typical response particularly among those with upper-class aspirations.
- 5) So called because they flourished in the central and western regions of Sumatra, notably, Medan and Padang (Frederick 1982: 106).
- 6) Strictly speaking, *irama melayu* refers to the music while *orkes melayu*, to its orchestral ensemble. Dangdut is an outgrowth of *irama melayu* and when it evolved into a distinct musical genre, the designation, *irama melayu*, went out of currency as well. Dangdut bands, however, continue to identify themselves as *orkes melayu*, adding the abbreviation, *OM* (*orkes melayu*) before the proper name of their musical outfit.
- 7) Hatch describes the *kroncong* musical style as consisting of songs or instrumental arrangements of songs somewhat similar to the Western major and minor with seven-tone pitch and interval tunings (Hatch 1989: 55). The songs were in the Indonesian language, while the instrumental parts consisted of florid, free meter introduction on flute, violin or guitar, followed by a full ensemble accompaniment of a solo vocalist (Hatch 1989: 55).
- 8) According to Sylado, the word *tanjidor* is a Betawi version of the Dutch *tiende* (the tenth) and *duur* (duration) which means that the bass drum is struck every tenth count. Sylado, R. (1983b), “Tradisi Musik Populer Indonesia,” in *Perjalanan Musik di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Pensi, p. 34.  
In the early colonial period, the *tanjidor* were small itinerant orchestras that played festive open-air music on instruments consisting mainly of clarinets, trumpets, cornets, horns and drums provided by the European colonisers and for exclusive European consumption. Eventually, the *tanjidor* repertoire, which then included only marches, ballroom, and parade music, widened to include indigenous folk music and by the nineteenth century came to be described loosely as *kroncong*. For a detailed discussion of *tanjidor* and *kroncong* music, see Heinz, E. (1975) “Kroncong and Tanjidor: Two Cases of Urban Folk Music in Jakarta,” *Asian Music*, 7 (1): 20–32.
- 9) The *Melayu-Deli* songs used as musical track for the Malayan film, *Djuwita*, was credited for the financial success of this film. Though this film was produced in Malaya in 1952, it was shown in

Indonesia much later and helped to popularize the *Melayu-Deli* songs. Other films which also used *Melayu-Deli* songs such as *Serodja* (1959) followed. In Frederick (1982: 106–107).

- 10) In the 1940's, according to Sylado, *orkes gambus* started blending its repertoire with the currently popular Latin-American tunes and gave rise to local dance versions known as *joget tango*, *joget rumba*, and *joget samba*. See Sylado (1990), "Dangdut Sekarang: Cinta Secara Daging," In *Monitor*, no. 224/IV, p. VI.
- 11) Sylado cites one example of an *orkes gambus* composition, *Cik Pia*, then famous for its salacious narrative. The song is purportedly about a young widow (*janda kembang*) who has long been yearning for the arrival of an ideal man. The ideal man, however, never turned up, and in frustration, the widow ended up picking up any man who came along, rather than bear the loneliness of sleeping alone (Sylado 1990).
- 12) Sylado also traces the ancestry of *gendang* to the Indian drum known as *tabla* which he claims was originally brought to Arabia by the caravan of Prophet Abraham during the early Muslim era. Sylado, "Dangdut Bisa Juga Sebagai Cerminan Kehidupan Sosial Politik Yang Tersudut," *Monitor*, no. 158, (n.d.), p. II.
- 13) The first time I went to look for Husein Bawafie's house in the crowded section of Tanah Abang, one of central Jakarta's oldest urban *kampungs*, none of those I asked in that neighborhood had heard of him, but they directed me instead to a nearby tenement building where a current popular female dangdut star, Titi Nur of the *Ken Dedes Group*, lives.
- 14) *Tempo* used the word as title of its music feature, "Panen Dangdut, Dangdut, Dangdut" of its 22 March 1975 edition. Contrary to more popular opinion that considers Husein Bawafie's "Boneka Dari India" (1956) as the first dangdut composition, Munif Bahasuan, one of the original members or *orkes melayu Chandralela*, claimed in 1979 that a much earlier composition by A. Haris, "Kudaku Lari" (1953), was the first to incorporate the Indian drum to the traditional *orkes melayu* ensemble consisting of acoustic guitar, harmonium, bass and mandolin. According to another *irama melayu* oldtimer, the late Said Effendi, the word, dangdut, was first used by a Radio Agustina announcer by the name of Amengku. See "Sampai Dangdut Berlistrik," in *Tempo*, 5 May 1979.
- 15) Sylado (1983a), "Peta Syair Lagu Populer Indonesia Selama 100 Tahun: Satu Amatan Sosiologis," *Perjalanan Musik di Indonesia*, Jakarta: PT Lithopica, p. 116.
- 16) Remy Sylado, "Dangdut Bisa Juga Sebagai Cerminan Kehidupan Sosial Politik yang Tersudut," *Monitor*, no. 158, (n. d.), p. II.
- 17) The concept of cultural hierarchy is borrowed from Bourdieu's study of the field of cultural production which, though focuses on the notion of hierarchy between genres in the field of art and literature, I found eminently useful as a conceptual framework in discussing popular music. One of the most significant insights it offers is on the struggle for legitimacy between competing genres, which is also a reality of popular music situation. See Bourdieu, P. (1983), "The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed," *Poetics* 12: 311–356.
- 18) There is no place in this chapter to provide a structural analysis of Indonesian society, but for the present purpose, suffice to say that these dominant groups refer to those in position of or with access to cultural, economic, and political capital, generally, upper-class, well-educated, and western-oriented. Consequently, their cultural assumptions form the basis for the criteria underlying the establishment of the hierarchy between musical genres, including, popular music.
- 19) Much of the information I used in discussing this controversy has been drawn from separate conversations and interviews with a number of dangdut oldtimers, notably, Husein Bawafie, Munif Bahasuan, Zakaria, Rhoma Irama, musicologists like Suka Hardjana, and music critic Remy Sylado.
- 20) Although pop, jazz and other musical genres were equally prejudiced towards the emerging *irama melayu* variant, it was rock and the rock groups who proved to be the most hostile critic. Consequently, my discussion on competing genres will focus mainly on the *rock-irama melayu* debate.
- 21) This kind of attitude is expressly articulated in the Indonesian tendency to judge anything *dari luar* (lit. imported) such as goods, commodities, professional degrees, people, experience, etc.,



- as eminently far more valuable than their local or indigenous counterparts. Sudjoko, writing on Indonesian mass culture, has pointed out his countrymen's propensity to equate *luar negeri* with high prestige. Sudjoko (1977), "Kebudayaan Massa," in *Prisma* 6: 3–12.
- 22) These impressions were culled from my own interviews with Rhoma Irama, Munif Bahasuan, Zakaria, and Husein Bawafie. See also magazine interviews of Rhoma Irama in *Vista* 20, 1988; *Matra*, July 1989 cited elsewhere in this article.
  - 23) Sometime in the 50s, it was said that an *orkes melayu* ensemble, *OM Al Kahwa*, played for free specifically for the celebrations of poor *kampung* residents who could not afford to hire a proper *orkes* ensemble. At these occasions, this group was supposed to have asked only coffee (*kahwa*, hence the name) in return for its services. In "Mengusut Dangdut," in *Tempo*, 20 March 1982.
  - 24) See *Vista* 1988; *Matra* 1989 interviews of Rhoma Irama. Also Sudjoko (1977).
  - 25) "Mengusut Dangdut," in *Tempo*, 20 March 1982.
  - 26) "Sebutan 'dangdut' itu sebetulnya mengandung dasar. Cemooh kelompok the haves kepada musik kampung ini. Mereka mencemooh suara gendang yang dominan dalam orkes melayu. Kemudian cemooh itu kami lemparkan kembali melalui lagu, yang kemudian kami beri judul Dangdut . . . Katakanlah, dengan lagu itu saya membuat suatu statement. Melalui lagu itu kami menentukan sikap: inilah jenis lagu kami! suka dengar, silakan. Nggak suka dengar, ya, nggak usah mengganggu, karena kami punya garis sendiri." Rhoma Irama, interview with *Matra*, July 1989: 17. The word *dangdut* appeared in the lyrics of Rhoma Irama's single, entitled "Ke Bina Ria," in 1973, shortly before he formed his *Soneta Group* on 13 October 1973.
  - 27) Examples typical of this kind of writing combining both romance and fantasy are: "Dunia Kecil Bukit Duri," in *Pertiwi* 54/55 (n. d.); "Si Mawar Menyandang Gitar," in *Tempo*, 30 June 1984; "Rhoma Irama (1): Tetangga Yang Sudah Tidur Bangun Lagi Khusus Untuk Mendengar Ia Menyanyi," in *Monitor*, no. 244/IV; "Rhoma Irama (2): Memilih Nama Karena Ia Pengagum Karya Sastra," in *Monitor*, no. 248/IV; "Rhoma Irama (3): Hujan Lebat Tiba-Tiba Berhenti Setelah Ia Baca Doa," in *Monitor*, no. 250/IV.
  - 28) The concept of 'mediation' refers to the process of appropriation and interpretation that particular texts or practices from different cultural moments or different cultural spheres are subjected to before they are made available to us. In this view, such texts or practices do not arrive to their audiences' attention 'innocent,' but bear the marks of a particular ideology. In this context, I am using the term, rather loosely, to refer to the kind of intervention that the institutional practices of the popular music industry employ to sell the song to the public through the singer's constructed image or performing personality.
  - 29) Although, I am certain, this is not Frederick's intention, his focus on Rhoma Irama has given many Indonesians this impression. Perhaps the best example of this misinterpretation is Rhoma Irama's claim that Frederick attributed to him the responsibility for revolutionizing dangdut when Frederick's own words are: "There was no musical revolution, but a gradual and not always certain development produced by an active musical imagination and the competition and financial rewards of the musical marketplace." (1982: 110).
  - 30) Irama's own biography which has been fed to the media also includes this succession of difficulties in his personal life, how he has triumphed over all these personal vicissitudes, and eventually leading up climactically to his current successes.
  - 31) For varying opinions on this subject, see, for instance, "Sampai Dangdut Berlistrik," in *Tempo* 5 May 1979. Hatch's own classification of the dangdut genres and sub-genres in the 1980s included *dangdut rock*, *dangdut pop*, *dangdut biasa*, and regional variants, *dangdut sunda*, and *dangdut jawa*. See Hatch (1989: 54).
  - 32) The unprecedented success of Rhoma Irama also provided impetus for the emergence of minor dangdut stars such as A. Rafiq and Latif Khan, as well as a number of Irama look-alikes such as Nano Romanza and Mara Karma who imitated the *Soneta* style in nearly every aspect including costumes.
  - 33) See "Goyang Dangdut, Goyang Ironis," in *Jawa Pos*, 31 December 1989.
  - 34) Panggabean was originally a drummer for a pop band, *The Mercy's*, and observers have attributed the peculiar percussion style of *OM Tarantula* to this background. Just exactly what this

distinctive *OM Tarantula* percussion style is like or how it differs from other *orkes melayu* style would require an expert analysis of formal musical characteristics which this present paper, unfortunately, is not in the position to provide.

- 35) *OM Tarantula*, unfortunately, disbanded when Panggabean's marriage to Camelia Malik ended in divorce. Nothing has been heard of Panggabean's musical activity after this divorce, but Camelia Malik continues to be one of the highest paid female recording dangdut singers of this time.
- 36) See, for instance, "Titiek 'Ken Dedes' Nur: Istri Mesti Pintar Masak," in *Nova*, no. 132/111, 2 September 1990. Elvy Sukaiseh, the dangdut female superstar, is also frequently profiled by the media in the same way, a form of hegemonic representation that obscures women's accomplishments while reinforcing the state's ideology of domesticity.
- 37) I am inclined to believe that Titiek Nur's domestic life has played a major part in limiting the group's prospects of moving into the limelight. Titiek Nur is married to an ex-ABRI Indonesian Army officer, thirty years her senior. This man is the group's manager and in that capacity, he organizes the group's activity — concert schedules, tours, fees, contracts, publicity. He, rather than Titiek, was the one who invited me to their house and during the interview, he answered most of the questions on Titiek's behalf. What was too obvious to ignore, and too unsettling, was his visible stranglehold of the group which he runs with dictatorial authority.
- 38) "Dangdut Setelah Halal di TV-RI," in *Tempo*, 5 May 1979, p. 51.
- 39) See Remy Sylado, in "Dangdut Bisa Juga Sebagai Cerminan Kehidupan Sosial Politik Yang Tersudut," in *Monitor* 158, (n. d.).
- 40) See "Rhoma Irama: *Assalamu'alaikum*," interview with *Vista* 1988: 23; also "Berjuang Dalam Goyang," interview with *Matra*, July 1989; "Dunia Kecil Bukit Duri," in *Pertiwi* 54/55 (n. d.) pp. 15–16.
- 41) "Berjuang Dalam Goyang," interview with *Matra*, July 1989: 17.
- 42) One of Rhoma Irama's singing partners was Elvy Sukaiseh with whom he had the longest musical collaboration that lasted five years.
- 43) See *Vista* 1988; *Matra* 1989; *Pertiwi* 54/55.
- 44) "Rhoma Irama (2): Memilih Nama Soneta Karena Ia Pengagum Karya Sastra," *Monitor* 171, no.248/IV, (n.d.); "Dunia Kecil Bukit Duri," *Pertiwi* 54/55, (n.d.).
- 45) "*Kami sebetulnya mendirikan Soneta dalam rangka mengumumkan 'perang' terhadap iblis dalam dada dan dalam musik . . . Ketika itulah kami membaiai 7 orang musisi untuk melawan setan di dalam diri kita, melawan setan dalam musik.*" Interview with *Matra*, July 1989. See also *Vista* 1988: 24; *Monitor* 171, no. 248/IV, n.d.
- 46) Interview with *Matra*, July 1989.
- 47) Interview with *Matra*, July 1989.
- 48) Irama first went to Mecca in 1975. Upon his return from this pilgrimage, the first thing he did was to change his original name Oma Irama, adding R for (Raden) and H for (Haji) and from then on came to be known as Rhoma Irama. Irama claims he had to stay at 5-star hotels to be free of distraction while immersed in this spiritual soul-searching journey. Interview with *Matra*, July 1989.
- 49) See Frederick's version of the way Irama was said to have deliberated on the kind of music he wanted (1982: 109). Since my own initial knowledge of Rhoma Irama came from Frederick's account, I was quite surprised to find Rhoma Irama more keen to talk about his religious beliefs than about his music. Whether this gap may be ascribed to Frederick's own mediation or to Irama's visionary, not to say fanatical, proclivities is difficult to know for certain. There were suggestions from certain groups, however, that this tendency may also be a form of cover-up for Irama's declining musical activity during the last few years. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of my encounter with Rhoma Irama was not his deeply Islamic conviction, which was admirable, but his tendency to ridicule all other religions, and to use the Koran to legitimate his frequently one-sided views.
- 50) Frederick defines "superstar," from the point of view of economics and technology, as "someone who is clearly significant beyond a relatively small economic or intellectual elite, to a genuinely

mass audience.” Frederick argues that despite the presence of entertainment ‘stars’ in Indonesia for many years, Rhoma Irama is probably the first entertainment figure to deserve that label (1982: 103).

- 51) From Frederick’s translation of Irama’s composition (1982: 116). The lines are from the last verse of the *surah* “Al-Ikhlās.” I have not been able to get hold of this music or the cassette on which it was included. Nor have I heard this song played at any of the concerts I have attended.
- 52) “Dasi dan Gincu,” from *Gali Lobang, Tutup Lobang, Soneta* vol. 15 (1989); translation mine.
- 53) Frederick’s translation of “Haram,” one of the songs in the soundtrack of the film, *Perjuangan dan Do’a* (1980). p. 121.
- 54) Frederick’s translation of “Termenung,” a song included in the soundtrack of the film, *Berkelana II* (1982: 118).
- 55) Frederick’s translation of “Begadang,” from the film of the same title (1982: 118).
- 56) Frederick’s translation of “Hak Azasi,” (1982: 117). Pancasila is the Indonesian state ideology.
- 57) TSSB/DSSB — acronym for *Tanda Sumbangan Sosial Berhadiah*, a government sponsored lottery.
- 58) From “Judi,” title song of the cassette from *Soneta* vol. 14 (1989); translation mine.
- 59) This view has been expressly articulated by University of Indonesia anthropologist, Prof. James Danandjaja. According to him, one of the reasons why dangdut has not managed to break through the entire spectrum of Indonesian society is dangdut’s identification with Islam. See “James Danandjaja: Dangdut Tak Berkembang,” in *Citra*, no. 65/11/24–30 June 1991.

While Prof. Danandjaja is entitled to his opinion, I believe this view is not only one-sided, but is altogether inaccurate, betraying an ignorance of the diversity of themes and lyrical content, as well as subgenres of dangdut music in particular, and the dynamics of popular music in general. Since only Rhoma Irama, of the hundreds of dangdut singers, has focused entirely on *dakwah* compositions, and since this type of composition is only one of the several, including a large number of secular ones, I find these sweeping generalizations unfounded, but not at all surprising, typical as they are of the usual elitist reactions to this music.

On another level, as audience response demonstrates, although proselytization might indeed be Irama’s intention, there, however, remains a lack of convergence between his wishes and the audiences’ own perceptions and use of this music.

- 60) “It’s all right to be poor / If it gives honor. It’s all right to be hungry / For the sake of piety.” from “Harga Diri.”
- 61) An unsettling side of Irama’s character is his double standard morality. For instance, he condemns the government-sponsored lottery as evil because of its deleterious effects on the poor, but strongly supports the establishment of casinos since those affected by these will be the foreigners. This same kind of morality also informs his sexist views on gender issues. See, for instance, his defense of polygamy, using zoological metaphor: “*Tidak ada singa betina mengawal sepuluh singa jantan. Yang ada singa jantan mengawal sepuluh singa betina.*” (“It’s not possible for one female lion to escort ten male lions; but one male lion can escort ten female lions.”). See Interview with *Vista* 20, 1988: 26–28.
- 62) “Dua Orang Raja,” in *Tempo*, 14 January 1978.
- 63) Since there are also non-Moslems among Irama’s fans, in addition to a heterogeneous range in both age and social background, “communities of taste” speaks well of Irama’s musical accomplishments.
- 64) See “Pentas Rhoma Irama Sudah tidak Menggigit,” which describes Irama’s 1988 performance in Semarang as no different from the visually and aurally contrived style of dangdut TV program, *Aneka Ria Safari*. The implication is that there was no longer anything new about the *Soneta* style that audiences have not seen before. Indeed, some disillusioned fans were claimed to have said that they might as well have listened to the tapes rather than being trampled by a jostling crowd. The sheer energy that used to drive the *Soneta* performances was no longer there, according to this article, and the visible efforts that Irama and his musicians tried to put into the show only served to highlight the group’s advancing years. In *Majalah Film* 20, 1988.
- 65) Irama is currently very much involved in purely *dakwah* activities, that is, as speaker for Islamic

gatherings, usually with well-known Islamic preachers like Zainuddin MZ. In the New Order, *dakwah* is the most important Muslim political activity. see Martin van Bruinessen (1990), "Indonesias's Ulama and Politics," in *Prisma* 49: 52–82.

- 66) Irama has been known to insist on the strict observance of Islamic duties by his musicians, but apart from that little else provides clues to Irama's management style as far as the *Soneta Group* is concerned. But it is worth noting that, except for 2 or 3 new faces, the group has remained intact even after nearly twenty years. It has been reported that Irama funded the pilgrimage expenses to Mecca of his musicians.
- 67) In a concert a week after Elvy Sukaiseh appeared in tiger-print slacks and blazer outfit at a live concert at *Taman Hiburan Tirtaloka*, Pluit, North Jakarta, all the female performers, including the male master of ceremonies, appeared in the same print. I also had my photographs of Elvy's live show borrowed by a nightclub performer who wanted to copy Elvy's costumes. To my knowledge, this practice of following a particular fashion trend is popular only among people in the entertainment world, not among the fans.
- 68) "Film-Film Rhoma Irama," in *Sinar Harapan Minggu*, 13 May 1979.
- 69) "Baru Mendengar, Belum Menghayati," in *Jawa Pos*, 11 September 1991.
- 70) According to Hatch, almost all radio stations were controlled by the government till 1978. Although a guarded *laissez-faire* policy on air time was adopted for new music in the mid-70s, the proportion and representation of western and newer genres of Indonesian music depended on the current government's attitudes, frequently inconsistent, toward these genres. State radio time was generally apportioned among gamelan, certain genres of western music, and certain newer genres of Indonesian music (1989: 51).
- 71) "Dangdut Setelah Halal di TV-R1," in *Tempo*, 5 May 1979: 50.
- 72) Although it has been reported that dangdut's TV exposure brought the music to the attention of the elites, just exactly what kind of attention or how much is difficult to ascertain. Despite dangdut's successful takeover of elite establishments like exclusive disco houses, the general attitude of the elites towards this music continues to be colored by class-bound values and prejudices. Thus, even if the Secretary of State, Moerdiono, likes to admit that he plays dangdut music in his Volvo on his way to work, it is, according to him, his driver, not him, who goes to the shops and gets the cassettes for him. See "Goyang Dangdut," in *Tempo*, 25 May 1991: 55.
- 73) In Sylado's account, the concept of 'stardom' was introduced into the Indonesian music scene with the entry of Western entertainment music (*musik hiburan*) and Hollywood films in the early 50s. Its growth was further encouraged by the local radio musical competition known as "bintang radio" (radio star). By the 60s, this came to be known as "singing idol" but the peculiar ideological climate of the Sukarno era, in particular its ban of Western pop music and, along with it, international pop norms and values, put an end to the further development of the 'star system.' In the present-day Indonesian pop music scene, the personality cult of media stardom is one of the offsprings of the New Order government. In Sylado, R. (1983b). See also Frederick's definition of "superstar," (1982: 103), note 50 in this paper.
- 74) *Citra* magazine is the first music publication devoted to this purpose. It first came out in the late 1980s and prints music charts, advertisements of new releases, cassette sales, and feature articles on both local and western pop stars.
- 75) See, for instance, "Satria Berdakwah, Rajah Dari Bawah," in *Tempo*, 30 June 1984, where Frederick is not only quoted and translated, but also misinterpreted. In this article, Frederick is claimed to have called dangdut an "onomatopoetic phenomenon" (*gejala onomatopoeia*).
- 76) Interview with Husein Bawafie, 4 January 1992.
- 77) Basofi Sudirman, along with Rhoma Irama and Eddy Sud, sits on the Board of Directors of *PAMMI*, and is also one of the major contributors to *PAMMI's* operational expenses, specifically, the rent of the office building in Cempaka Putih, Central Jakarta. Of the 2 years' lease of Rp. 20 million, Rp. 5 million came from Sudirman's contribution, another Rp. 5 million from Rhoma Irama, and Rp. 10 million from Eddy Sud. From Interview with Ujang Haviana, Secretary of *PAMMI*, 28 June 1991.
- 78) "Selingan: Goyang Dangdut," in *Tempo*, 25 May 1991, p. 59.

79) From interview with journalists from *Nova* and *Citra*, 2 July 1991.

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