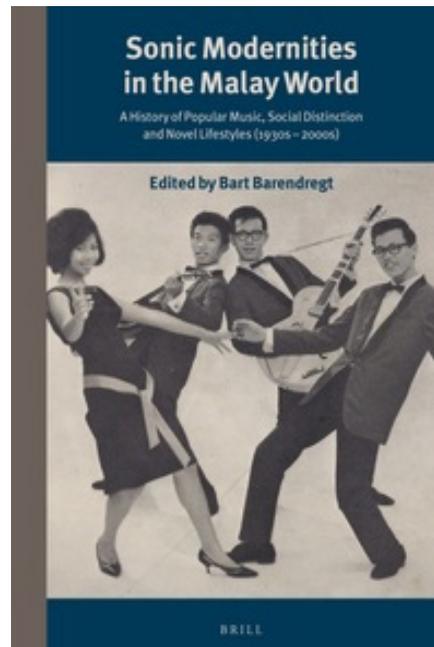


*Sonic Modernities in the Malay World: A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction, and Novel Lifestyles* by Barendregt, Bart (ed.).  
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This edited volume breaks new ground in the historiography of the Southeast Asian region through its examination of formative and historically significant events and circumstances among popular music "taste makers" and consumers. Unlike the typical chronological unfolding of events associated with traditional historical studies, this volume examines "multiple modernities" across temporal divisions. This multiplicity is expressed in the ever-evolving popular musics of the Malay world. The authors make claims to avoid the pitfalls associated with



nation-state rhetoric and they do so convincingly. This rhetoric results when subjecting musical styles and cultural developments to a largely politically constructed framework (late colonial period, Revolution, Independence, New Order, Reformasi, etc.) where historians may not be able to "problematize" nation-centered narratives" (p. 6). That is not to say the dynamics of governmental policies, economic shifts, or international cultural flows have little relevance towards framing the history of popular music in Southeast Asia. Rather, the authors in this volume cast their gaze upon an array of possible modernities embedded in two broad periods: late colonial to nation state (1920s–1960s) and the peak of authoritarian rule to emergent democracies (1970s–2000s).

The editor of this volume, Bart Barendregt, positions their approach as a departure from Western-based popular music studies. According to him, these studies often rely on solely synchronic intersections between popular expression and larger contemporary social, and political developments. Barendregt points out that this approach lacks the temporal perception of what precedes and thereby shapes and informs popular music in its social context. Instead the authors present diachronic depictions of popular musics as they traverse temporal boundaries and provide, "alternative conceptions of modernity as they surface in the realm of the popular and the everyday" (p. 6).

This collection of stimulating essays covering Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and neighbouring countries is divided into five parts: Part 1: *An Emergent Entertainment Industry*; Part 2: *The Sound of Melayu*; Part 3: *New Subjectivities and Unofficial Ideologies*; Part 4: *Musical Nationalisms*; and Part 5: *The Ethnic Modern*. Perhaps rightly so, Part 1, together with an introductory chapter by the editor, constitutes almost half the contents of the book. I did not find this disproportionate, but rather a necessary ground laying for the essays that follow, which include discussions of genres such as *pop Melayu*, *dangdut*, *dugem* and *ronggeng* within the "modernities" discourse.

In Part 1, Philip Yampolsky provides a thorough account of Dutch East Indies radio broadcasts as a formative force in shaping the popular music industry towards the end of

Indonesia's colonial era. He reminds readers that researching radio broadcasting, "uncovers musicians who did not make it onto record, and situates music in a localized and day-to-day temporal context" (p. 49). One case study presented from late 1930s Surabaya, Java speaks to local popular music tastes and Radio's response. Yampolsky has trolled through historical documents such as *Soeara Nirom*, a government controlled radio program guide. In it we learn that the NIROM broadcasting network has been "inundated with letters and reports from all corners of the colony" (p. 48). The guide attests to an overwhelmingly positive response in favour of regular live broadcasts of two *gambus* groups, Gamboes Orkest Alhambra and later, Gamboes Orkest Assoffa. As I read this passage, I felt transported back to a 1930s Central Java to encounter the daily lives of a small but significant demographic: Arabic listeners and their tastes made evident through Yampolsky's passionate research into Indonesia's early music industry.

In Part 2, a "duet of research" surveys more than 30 years of *Pop Melayu* and *Pop Indonesia*. In Chapter 5, Andrew Wientraub explores the impetus for the creation of *Pop Melayu*, an urban Jakarta 1960s fusion of western pop and local Malay-based songs. This crossover genre helped unify divergent social formations under the banner of modernity, while maintaining traditional emblems and roots. For 1960s urban Indonesian youth culture, "*Pop Melayu* grounded the present in the past" (p. 165). *Pop Melayu* was consumed by cross sections of a rapidly modernising Indonesian society who were negotiating traditional stratified social hierarchies, gender issues, changing sacred and secular values to the backdrop of polarising political agendas. Among this motley mix of world views, *Pop Melayu* appealed to many modernising pop culture consumers because it, "mediated the contradictions and ambivalences of everyday life" (p. 165). Weintraub astutely delimits his discussion to a brief but potent period of time (1968–1975) just prior to the *dangdut* wave led by artists such as Rhoma Irama. In Chapter 6, Weintraub's "duet" partner, Emma Baulch takes up the discussion of *Pop Melayu* and positions it against *Pop Indonesia*. She problematises the two genres and how they serve as emblems for a dichotomy between rural and urban views and tastes. She

does this by following the trajectory of Kangen Band, a "rags to riches" group from Lampung, South Sumatra who started on the streets and traversed the Sunda Strait to stardom in the Jakarta metropolis. However, their strategically marketed image of *kampungan* or "backward and village" was simultaneously intertwined with the *gedongan* refinement of the urban modern thereby situating the group in between genres. In this way Baulch aims to, "rework existing scholarship relating to Indonesian pop genres and modernity, as well as interrogate some broader theories of genre" (p. 187).

Part 3 and 4 contain refreshing case studies of the ordinary, the ambiguous and various music genres of political potency including rave music, *dangdut* and karaoke. Lars Gjelstad explores Central Javanese musics that stand in contrast to classical gamelan traditions. Instead of palaces and *pendopos*, the reader learns of raves and discos that help situate Jawa Tengah modernity through the life worlds of "localized networks of ordinary youth living in rapidly transforming Malay worlds" (p. 245). His chapter, based on fieldwork during the 1990s in Surakarta, introduces the Suglay boys, a gang of Iwan Fals-following youth whose "ideals of explicitly expressing their emotions, needs and personalities in many ways break with deeply grounded Javanese conceptions of respect, etiquette, seniority, and hierarchy" (p. 245). In Chapters 8 and 9, the highly addictive dance driven genre of *dangdut* plays out as both, "an ephemeral celebration of collective bodily euphoria" (p. 264) and a genre entangled in its, "lived experiences that lie beneath the multi-faceted and contentious cultural politics of *dangdut* music in Indonesia" (p. 272).

Part 5 contains two illuminating essays that deal with ethnicity and modernity. The first on the musical aspects of *Pop Sunda* in West Java is a welcome change from previous chapters because its primary concern are "local colour" musical structures i.e., tonal systems, melodic embellishments, timbre, rhythm etc. I found this particularly relevant. The author poses the question, beyond language, what makes *Pop Sunda* different from other popular musics? The essay analyses musical structures to identity – what makes popular music sound Sundanese. After an informative historical survey of *jaipongan*, *tembang*, *Sunda Cianjuran*,

*degung kawih* and other genres, the essay is concerned with the structural aspects of, "time and melody, and also performative aspects, such as instrumentation, some vocal qualities, absolute pitch and tempo" (p. 335). The author, Wim Van Zanten, observes that, "keyboard synthesizers have a standardizing effect on the pitch of popular songs". But he goes on to say tone systems, musical phrases and singing ornaments evoke, "an enchanted form, musically coloured 'Sundanese'" (p. 349).

The final essay of the volume takes the reader to Malaysian indigenous communities who grapple with tense negotiations in the discourse of periphery and cultural change. By embracing the commercial and controversial "World Music" genre, *orang asli* or "original people" have self-empowered and "generated a new interest and cultural revitalization among its younger generation" (p. 355). The author, Tan Sooi Beng, introduces us to Akar Umbi, a group with cultural collaboration at its core. Mak Minah Anggong, a Temuan *orang asli* singer is their leader and she is accompanied by other Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian musicians. Their music has been disseminated along with their message that has, "generated awareness that the survival of Temuan culture is dependent on the forests, rivers, and land around them" (p. 361). This essay demonstrates how modernity may be consciously taken up, owned, and enlisted as a force to empower and revitalise marginalised social formations in Southeast Asian nation states.

Despite its price tag being almost beyond the reach of scholars in the region it represents, this book makes valuable contributions to the scholarship on Southeast Asia. The authors have presented case studies that cross disciplinary boundaries between ethnomusicology, popular music studies and historiography. Recently, "historical ethnomusicology" was elevated by the Society for Ethnomusicology Board members from an "interest group" to an official "section". This endorsement is telling as books like "Sonic Modernities" will become models for hybridising research methods and approaches to this (re)emerging discipline.