

## *Book Review*

# Performing the Arts of Indonesia: Malay Identity and Politics in the Music, Dance and Theatre of the Riau Islands

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The Riau Islands in Indonesia are strategically located at the nexus of the straits of Malacca (between Sumatra and what is now Peninsular Malaysia), the South China Sea, and the Karimata Strait (between South Sumatra and West Kalimantan in Borneo island). The historical significance of this archipelago dates back to Srivijayan maritime routes as well as the subsequent Southeast Asia's age of commerce (15th–17th centuries) that shaped early modern society, economy, and religious belief in the region. The islands are home to the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, a historical centre of Malay culture linked to other sultanates of the extended Malay world. The archipelago is also home to the sea-dwelling *orang laut* (sea people) communities that played an important role in trade as well as the development of Malay kingdoms. Presently, the Riau Islands are a peripheral Indonesian province strategically located between modern Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, making it a cultural stronghold of Malay music, dance, theatre, poetry, martial arts, and other intangible cultural heritage forms.

*Performing the Arts of Indonesia: Malay Identity and Politics in the Music, Dance and Theatre of the Riau Islands* became a seminal publication on this largely understudied region within Malay performing arts studies specifically and maritime Southeast Asian performance traditions at large. The anthology is product of a collaborative research project led by the editor and comprising authors made up of historians, ethnomusicologists, ethnochoreologists, anthropologists, and an oral tradition scholar. The varied professional backgrounds of the authors makes this a strong interdisciplinary publication with a focus on the performing arts heritage of this cultural locale. With this project, the editor fills a significant gap on the Riau Islands, Malay identity and the performing arts discourse, complementing her 2012 landmark publication on music traditions of Sumatra. The chapters by local scholars, narratives from local cultural specialists, and accounts of musicians and performers strengthen emic conceptualisations of Malay terminology used throughout the book. Aside from investigating diverse performance forms, the authors discuss the identity and significance of place considering geographical (island, archipelago, sea); political (village, district, province); and cultural (sultanate, community, the Malay world) realms.

The structure of the volume is fourfold discussing: (1) a macro analysis of the Riau archipelago province within the southern Malay world, (2) two western Riau archipelagos focusing on the Lingga, Karimun, and Bintan regencies, (3) the northern and north-eastern archipelago focusing on Anambas and Natuna regencies, and (4) the art and popular culture of the cities focusing on Tanjung Pinang and Batam. In the first section, Kartomi's chapter serves as a good introduction to the region, describing main traditional forms as well as the socio-historical context of the islands. Andaya's chapter provides a discussion and conceptualisation of the southern Malays particularly in the Pulau Tujuh archipelagos and Southwest Borneo, with a notable recognition of the role that Pontianak and Kalimantan play in redefining the idea of Malayness. Chou's investigation focuses on *lagu pop* (pop songs) and *music gereja* (church music), delving into a soundscape analysis and providing descriptions of the two genres that are part of a recent soundscape in the islands. Kartomi's chapter on the *nobat* ensemble of the Riau-Lingga sultanate describes its history including the pre-colonial, colonial, post-independence, and post-Suharto experiences. McCallum's chapter characterises representations of sound in

19th century Riau literary texts including descriptions and contexts through three proposed concepts: *azmat* (awe-inspiring), *ramai* (busy-noisiness), and *merdu* (harmonious).

In the second section, Kornhauser discusses *bangsawan* with an analysis of two performances and concludes with a brief musical analysis. Scarfe and Hasbi illustrate the significance of place through *biola* players Nasri and Adi. Their chapter presents a mix of ethnographic and biographic descriptions with interesting interpretations of new and modern *mak yong* compositions. Wee's research culminated in her remarkable chapter on kinship among musicians of Penyengat, expounding on musical lineage and family heritage, and highlighting alternative analytical approaches to musical genres with a focus on musicians who may be involved in more than one genre. Alfirafindra's and Martiara's chapter provides new conceptualisations of *zapin*, including a brief analysis of motifs as well as a report on recent festivals and performances.

Syafaruddin, Mora, and Kartomi begin the third section with a chapter on *gobang* mask dance theatre of the Anambas regency based on the research and writings of a cultural expert on the form. This is an understudied genre, which makes up for the relative lack of bibliographic references in the chapter. Thomas' chapter describes another under-researched genre, *mendu*, in the Natuna Islands. The comprehensive narrative is highly descriptive with a number of references to older writings on the form. The last section of the anthology begins with Benjamin's chapter which proposes the concept of "art music" to conceptualise *kreasi baru* (new compositions) and performances by Tanjung Pinang and Pulau Penyengat musicians. The etic musical descriptions present insights into specific musicians and new approaches, yet they would benefit from emic conceptualisations of genres such as *musik seni* (art music), *kreasi baru* (new compositions) and *musik kontemporer* (contemporary music) including the larger Indonesian context of these experiences and their influences in the Riau Islands Malay context. Mora's chapter discusses cosmopolitanism in the archipelago through an analysis of the underground scene, including Malay bands and musicians. The investigation includes hybrid and popular genres considering new ways of projecting a sense of Malayness. Lastly, Long's elegiac narrative serves as a good concluding chapter that considers Malay identity and contemporary positionalities.

The strength and challenge of the volume lies in its seminal nature. Several chapters lack bibliographic references, which are compiled and placed at the end of the volume. Some of the chapters are highly descriptive of specific forms. For genres such as *gobang* and *mendu*, the reader might wonder about their relationship to other traditions and how performers who participate in different genres continue to reshape the character and features of each form. There are a number of recurring terms throughout the volume such as *jiwa seni* (artistic soul) used to explain genealogy, *otodidak* (autodidact) used to describe a pedagogical approach, and *kacukan* (mixed/hybrid) that could benefit from in-depth scrutiny, emic views, and comparisons with other forms in maritime Southeast Asia. While the first half of the book title makes for an instant eye-catcher, the indigenous concept of *kacukan* is representative of the intricacies of numerous historical, geographic, and cultural factors that have and continue to influence conceptualisations of Malay identity and the Riau Islands culture. The volume has set the foundations for future studies in this region and compels academics to revisit the analysis and discourse of performance and heritage in the extended Malay world.