# The Musical Aesthetics of "Likad" Composed by Dewa Ketut Alit

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**Abstract:** The music "Likad" was composed in 2020 by Dewa Ketut Alit, a composer born and living in Pengosekan Ubud, Bali. The purpose of this study is to explore (1) the process of formation, the form of the work which consists of, (2) the form, (3) the content or things discussed in this work, and (4) the aesthetics of the form "Likad". The reason for carrying out this research is considering that the work "Likad" contains innovations that are important to examine for clarity, as one manifestation of the development of gamelan music, especially Balinese gamelan. This research is qualitative in nature which reveals the clarity of the creative process, the form of "Likad". The data source for this study is the work of "Likad" himself. The values contained in the work of "Likad" were examined by theory of musical form and theory of aesthetics. Data in this study were obtained through observation, and interviews. The results of this study, among others, the title "Likad" which means 'difficult' is reflected in the kotekan pattern of this work which is made more complex than the Balinese traditional pattern. Most of these works present interlocking patterns and a kind of ostinato or short rhythm with repetitions that tend to be more intense. This work raises the issue of Covid-19, in which many parties are 'likad' or unable to do activities freely.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, music, likad, salukat.

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#### Introduction

The creation of musical works that are oriented towards achieving a higher level of creativity, quality, and novelty (hereinafter referred to as valuable musical works) is generally carried out through a long, selective, and complex process. Perseverance, knowledge, sharp intuition, and of course inventiveness or creativity are certainly very much needed in creating work of value. Sumardjo (2016: 43) states, "Those who are only knowledgeable and skilled but less creative, will certainly be 'artisans' who are different from 'artists'," (in the sense of someone or something that stands out thanks to their creativity).

Valuable music is of course created by talented composers who always create works with critical thinking in their fields and even the urgency of human life in general. As stated by Lachenmann, an art critic from Germany that, "If someone opens himself to all criteria and traditions critically, then at this time he is capable of doing everything" (Mack, 2001: 169). Lachenmann's opinion is relevant to the ability of several composers, especially in Bali, who carry musical, contemporary or similar novelties in their works. They are known not only for

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being able to create such music, but also for being skilled at creating compositions using Balinese traditional grammar.

Dewa Ketut Alit, or better known as Dewa Alit, is one of several Balinese gamelan music artists (hereinafter referred to as Balinese composers) who deserves to be said to be diligent in creating valuable musical works. More or less since the early 2000s, the basis used by Dewa Alit in creating music has been different from the creation of traditional Balinese gamelan music in general. In the tradition of Balinese gamelan music composition, the intensity of the use of compositional principles that are recognized from generation to generation or standard is more dominant and in thematic terms which often raise natural phenomena.

Dewa Alit's music can be said to represent breadth, depth, expressiveness, and innovation, or it can also be called "art music" (Dermott, 2013: 37). He has been intensely creating gamelan music works that contain new offerings from idioms and forms of his work. The contents of each of Dewa Alit's works often raise human issues. Most of his works are created using gamelan that he designed himself, namely the gamelan "Salukat". Initially, the tuning for the Salukat gamelan was a seven-tone pelog or saih pitu. However, in its development, the gamelan Salukat has undergone three tuning system changes where currently the number of tones in one octave is claimed by Dewa Alit to be eleven tones.

Dewa Alit is an artist who deserves to be considered as giving a new color to the tradition of creating music, especially for Balinese gamelan. This statement is of course based on his music which has been the subject of discussion several times by major media and especially foreign academics. The album "Chasing the Phantom" by Dewa Alit which is played on the gamelan Salukat, is included in the ten best classical music albums on www.bandcamp.com and the musical work "Likad" is included in the nomination for best classical contemporary music in 2022 according to The New York Time's version, one of the leading mass media in the United States.

A number of presentations discussing several of Dewa Alit's works have also been made by several foreign academics and can be watched on the Nusantara Arts Youtube channel. Some of these presentations included, (1) Compositions of Dewa Alit Pt.4: Ngejuk Memedi" Michael Tenzer Gamelan Masters Guest Lecture #20 , (2) Compositions of Dewa Alit Pt.3: Genetik" Oscar Smith - Gamelan Master Guest Lecture # 19 (Smith, 2020), and (3) Compositions of Dewa Alit Pt.1: Geregel" Wayne Vitale Gamelan Masters Guest Lecture Series #17.

Dewa Alit and the Salukat group have performed a number of performances in the last fourteen years or so. Based on the official website of Salukat (www.dewaalitsalukat.com) that the Salukat group toured in 2009 and 2010 at an event entitled "A House in Bali". The event was part of a series of United States tours and was staged at several venues such as (1) Zellerbach Hall, Cal Arts, in Berkeley, (2) Cutler Majestic Theatre, Emerson College, in Boston (3) Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music, in New York. In 2013 and 2015

the Salukat group toured Malaysia at the International Gamelan Festival, at Universiti Teknologi Mara, Kuala Lumpur.

In 2018 the Salukat group underwent a European tour at (1) International Gamelan Festival, in Munich, Germany, (2) Sommerscen Festival, in Malmo, Sweden (3) Roskilde Festival, in Denmark, and (4) Rudolstadt Festival, in Germany. A year later, in 2019, Salukat went on tour to Sharajah, United Arab Emirates to be precise at the 2019 Sharajah Architecture Triennial. They are back on their European tour in 2022 at two events, namely the Rewire Festival, in The Hague, Netherlands, and Bourse de Commerce, in city of Paris, France.

Everything about the concept of creating new music offered by Dewa Alit is currently formed from a process that is not short, as previously explained, this process was formed for more than two decades. Evidence of this statement can be seen from his work "Geregel" which was created in 2000 on the Semara Dhana gamelan. The work received appreciation from Wayne Vitale and was analyzed in the music journal "Perspectives on New Music". Vitale said that this work opens a new offer for kebyaran musical compositions which do not have to be created in a five-tone pelog gamelan, but can also be made in a seven-tone pelog gamelan (Vitale, 2002: 1).

The researcher's observation of the quality of the content and form of music offered by Dewa Alit led to the researcher's intention to study one of his works, namely "Likad" as a research object. The process of realizing the musical work "Likad" certainly contains a lot of knowledge of "new" music composition (new music, contemporary music, or the like) and even valuable music. Music that has value cannot be separated from the background of its creators based on experience, compositional skills, and conception techniques (designs) of musical works that deserve to be said to promote creativity.

It should be emphasized that the musical piece "Likad" being studied this time is played in the gamelan Salukat and will be released in 2022 on www.bandcamp.com and Youtube. This research examines in more depth what motivated, inspired, or moved Dewa Alit to create this work. An investigation into the music of "Likad" is mapped in terms of (1) form consisting of extrinsic content or ideas of the work and intrinsic or form of this work, and (2) the aesthetics of the musical work "Likad" through transcripts in the form of notations made and loaded in such a way. this research. This research is also a form of effort in uncovering Dewa Alit's thoughts, knowledge, and experiences in composing both in general (from the time he started working until now) and specifically (in the creation of the musical work "Likad").

Broadly speaking, the compositional concept and value offer from Dewa Alit which is realized through the form of the musical work "Likad" are the main goals or objectives revealed through this research. The phenomenon of Dewa Alit's music must be analyzed more clearly in order to create a clear purpose and impact of the musical concept, which is specifically revealed and studied through the form and aesthetics of "Likad" music. As is the case with contemporary music which emphasizes the principle of working at the end of the art development that is involved (Mack, 2001: 35), especially in the world of Balinese gamelan music

composition, it still reaps pros and cons from a number of parties, both non-academicians and even music academics.

Through this research, the researcher seeks to reveal the clarity of (1) the purpose and (2) the impact of valuable music with contemporary spirit and grammar which is hypothetically quite in line with the orchestration and grammar of the musical work "Likad", through scientific theories of art. The quality of the content and form of the musical work "Likad" is simultaneously examined from several points of view based on several theories, statements or statements from relevant academics, curators, art critics, and others.

The researcher's motivation in carrying out this research is to broaden references in (1) conceptualizing every artistic idea that comes to mind (determining the stages of the creative process) (2) making musical works with the concept of novelty and (3) devising ways or tricks to realize them in the medium . These three things have strengthened the interest of researchers to investigate the phenomenon of an object, especially musical works that can be observed to contain quality and value, as happened in the music of "Likad". It is hoped that this research will be useful for those who work in the field of music as a reference in analyzing music and composing.

# **Methodology**

This research is the result of qualitative research based on in-depth interviews (Sugiyono, 2014; Moleong, 2018). The advantage of this method is that it shows a consistent picture of the thoughts of the research object.

Determination of informants using purposive sampling technique involving key informants, expert informants, and additional informants. The data in this study were obtained through observation, interviews. Observation in simple terms can be interpreted as the activity of observing human activities, the physical characteristics of social situations, and how it feels when you are part of that situation (field conditions). Interviews were conducted to obtain information that cannot be observed or cannot be obtained with other tools (Murdiyanto, 2020). The data obtained was then analyzed using qualitative techniques with domain analysis methods that examine the research variables.

The results of the analysis were reviewed again using the triangulation method, between the results of key informant interviews by comparing the results of key informant interviews with other informants, comparing interview results with observations, comparing interviews with scientific writing (which supports this research), comparing observations with scientific writing. All data that has been reviewed through these stages is presented formally through diagrams, notations, and informally in the form of descriptions.

## **Results and discussion**

A work of art certainly has a form or something that can be observed from it. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (The Big Indonesian Dictionary) (2016) defines "existence" as something that can be touched and the existence (existence) of something. According to Djelantik (1999) and Djelantik (2004), form in a work of art refers to a reality that appears concretely (can be perceived with the eyes or

ears) or a reality that does not appear concretely (abstract) which can only be imagined as something told or read in books (Sabatari, 2015: 241). This is of course in accordance with the notion of the form of an artwork that is built by content (extrinsic or ideas in the form of thematic things) and form (intrinsic or something in the form of audio-visual).

It should be known in advance that extrinsic value can simply be understood as the value behind the senses. It can be clarified again that the phrase "behind the senses" is meant things related to ideas, ideas that cannot be sensed. Only the mind can digest ideas, and ideas after ideas (Sumardjo, 2016: 156-157). The value of form after form or things that can be sensed in works of art is called intrinsic value. Basically, works of art can be observed audio, visual or both. This value refers to what we can observe and enjoy from hearing, seeing or both. Texture, curves, dynamics, transitions, and other tangible elements of a work of art are things that lead to an understanding of the form of a work of art.

Dewa Alit had the opportunity to convey his views on Balinese culture and what he thinks is important to pay attention to through his experience in the world he is involved in, namely Balinese gamelan music, whether as a musician or as a composer in an essay. He commented that, "Bali is very fortunate to have such a profound and meaningful form of traditional gamelan music. This cultural wealth needs to be properly maintained and become the foundation for the continuation of traditional music in the future. It is part of our cultural design that gives Bali its unique reputation. Preservers of culture must realize that this does not happen by itself. This was born from a long process from generation to generation. However, in the 'living tradition' there is an unavoidable contradiction. Gamelan is only considered as a musical medium, in very limited circumstances. It is tied to the notion of 'living tradition'. The rules, which are essentially just guidelines, have become the framework for percussion composition. If we, as Balinese, become apathetic towards core issues in the development of our own art form, then should we hope that non-Balinese will take care of things we have so far neglected?" (Smith, 2019: 16).



[Source: www.dewaalitsalukat.com, 2023] Figure 1. Dewa Ketut Alit

In the essay, Dewa Alit also said that Balinese gamelan music must always change and be without boundaries. This mission has motivated him to design and build a gamelan ensemble or barungan Salukat and sekehe (community club) to perform "new" music in the ensemble. What he has done is a strategy that has allowed Dewa Alit to more freely realize "new" musical ideas in a strong traditional environment. This, he said, is a situation that is analogous or similar to contemporary Bali itself and ultimately gives meaning to his own work, not just because it maintains a traditional identity. More importantly, empowering and positioning gamelan music as the best "own host" so that it can give birth to a musical lifestyle that is resistant to attacks by global capitalism that is increasingly widespread.

Gamelan Salukat is one of Dewa Alit's inventions, as an object created from his thoughts about musical culture, especially through Balinese gamelan (Sutika, 2016; denpasarkota.go.id, 2018; Sudiani, 2018). Laras Salukat, which was originally a seven-tone pelog or saih pitu, was again developed by Dewa Alit. Discussions, conversations, and what he observes from other cultures while teaching gamelan to several countries have certainly contributed significantly to how Dewa Alit behaves and develops through his works. Dewa Alit even claims that for eighteen years he has always been invited to teach gamelan. The result of many years of traveling around the world has initiated him to develop the tuning system for the gamelan Salukat, which has been changed three times where currently the number of notes in one octave is claimed by Dewa Alit to be eleven tones. What Dewa Alit did was in line with how he views music culture, especially composing in Bali.



[Source: www.dewaalitsalukat.com, 2023] Figure 2. Gamelan Salukat

Dewa Alit's views have also been represented through his works, one of which is his musical work entitled "Likad". It was reiterated that the work was created by an artist whose full name is Dewa Ketut Alit. He was born on May 21, 1973 in Pengosekan, Ubud. The artist, better known as Dewa Alit, is known as a Balinese gamelan player and composer. The work "Likad" was created in Pengosekan and performed by the gamelan group Salukat, a gamelan group started by Dewa Alit since 2004 and officially formed as a sekaa or group in 2007. This group often performs works from Dewa Alit for gamelan Salukat and in several time also performed works by other composers such as those by I Made Regog and I Wayan Gandra.

The title of the work which is used as the object of this research leads to the word 'likad' which in *Kamus Bali-Indonesia* (the Balinese-Indonesian Language Dictionary) (2016) means 'difficult'. In everyday life, this word is often used to express an 'unusual' or 'uncomfortable' situation. The author had interviewed Dewa Alit on March 29, 2023 at Pondok Salukat, Pengosekan. He said that the work "Likad" actually began to be designed since the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, which peaked in 2020. Around that year, he began designing the work "Likad" and tuning the newest Salukat gamelan system. In the end, this work was officially released in 2022 on the website www.bandcamp.com, (a site that provides online music playback services which also allows users to sell and buy the desired piece of music) and YouTube. The content or idea of the work "Likad" was inspired by human activities that were uncomfortable and not free during the lockdown of the Covid-19 outbreak (Alit, 2023).

Dewa Alit's representation of the word likad can also be observed from the presentation of the form of this composition. Many of the textures that he presents in Likad are different from the traditional Balinese composition models which tend to be homophonic or composed of ngembat, ngempyung, and so on. According to Michael Tenzer (a professor of ethnomusicology at the University of British Columbia, Canada who is widely known for his works and writings involving Balinese gamelan) there is a certain hierarchy in the orchestration and texture of traditional or conventional gamelan music as the most efficient is characterized as heterophonic, with orchestral layers. rhythmically graded and regular that tunes on the same pitch scale with regular metric accents (Smith, 2019: 10).

It should be noted that the term "texture" in the field of music is understood as the unique arrangement and relationship of melodic and harmonic factors in music (Miller, 2017). Another aspect that is also touched on in texture is sonority, which is about richness (diversity) and thinness in terms of the sound unity of a piece of music. This term is also used to discuss the manifestation of a composer's musical instincts into a piece of music. Each composer generally has the same musical instincts, even though their artistic paths are different. When talking about the texture of a piece of music, the aspects that are reviewed are its construction, thematic ideas, figuration (close to comparisons), and harmonic distance (Wagner, 1959: 3).

Orchestration, which is simply defined as "musical arrangement for orchestra", is actually a highly specialized component of musical composition.

This requires a thorough knowledge of the theoretical musical subject (harmonies, counterpoints, form, etc.) and a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics and peculiarities of all the instruments used in a contemporary symphony orchestra. Things like pitch range, technical capacity, possible combinations, as well as the various tonal limitations, strengths and weaknesses of each instrument. It is an essential part of any orchestral technique. According to Joseph Wagner, this kind of technique can be obtained in exactly the same way (from one musician and composer to another), so that facilities in playing musical instruments and composing music become possible and practical, through real practice. Orchestration of any kind is impractical and impossible until the purely technical elements of the musical structure have been properly recognized, assimilated and evaluated. This aspect of the subject as a prerequisite for assessment is, in essence, recognized in this text as the essence of a good and applicable assessment technique (Wagner, 1959: 2).

What was conveyed by Tenzer is in accordance with the results of an analysis conducted by Wayne Vitale on the orchestration and texture of conventional Balinese compositions. Heterophonic texture leads to a combination of kotekan systems that combine monophonic systems (which are horizontal or melodic) and homophonic (which contain a kempyungan or some kind of chord) with other instruments that are homophonic, even polyphonic (which can be played by ugal instruments) although basically this polyphonic system "tied" by the register (high and low pitch) of the jajar pageh melody (which is generally sung by the instruments pemcah, calung, and jegogan). The following is the general texture of Balinese gamelan music referred to and denoted by Wayne Vitale (Vitale, 1990: 14).



[Source: Vitale, 1990] Figure 3. Balinese Gamelan Tone Texture Hierarchy

In the context of this research, the researcher did not describe the form of "Likad" in detail, bearing in mind that there are certain limitations based on the format of this article that must be adhered to, so it was decided that this research would examine the aesthetics of the form of "Likad". One more thing is that this research will also refer to the video by "Likad" which was uploaded by Dewa Alit's account (https: //youtu.be/xw1nIDrTmW0). This work presents musical materials, some of which are kotekan (interlocking), patterns of blending tones, accents, and structures that are made with a scheme that avoids Balinese

gamelan music in general. The sentence "avoiding Balinese gamelan music in general" is of course very reasonable. The tuning of the Salukat gamelan system, which does not use pelog or slendro tunings, of course causes the tonal combination patterns of this work to become new (especially in the context of Balinese musical culture). Another thing that the researcher observes from Likad's work is the polyrhythmic system in the form of the use of 5/8, 7/8, 10/8, 11/8 and so on, coupled with kotekan patterns, most of which do not return to the usual pattern at all. like the scheme notated by Vitale above. Based on Vitale's scheme, it can be concluded that the Balinese kotekan scheme is usually suitable for 2/4, 4/4 or multiples of it (if viewed in Western music theory). Unlike the case with performances in this music which contains emphasis or repetition of kotekan which is not in accordance with the 4/4 rhythm or its multiples. Try to observe the following scheme.



Figure 4. A model of the kotekan rhythm pattern at the beginning of "Likad"

The snippet of the kotekan rhythm is a small part of the entire work "Likad" which offers a scheme of "avoiding" Balinese traditional music material in general. The above notation is made only by taking the rhythmic pressure on one of the kotekan patterns of the pemade instrument at the beginning of the work "Likad". It can be clearly observed that the repetition of the rhythm pattern above does not show a match with 2/4, 4/4 measures or their multiples like the Balinese kotekan pattern in general. If we review that a note with a red head fills 3 beats and a note with a black head fills 2.5 beats. This is one of Dewa Alit's offerings in composing through interlocking patterns or kotekan that are presented.

There is a cut of the emphasis or accent model that was also created by Dewa Alit in the work "Likad" which can be observed at 4:53 in the video accessed via the link above (hereinafter read: video). The accent model that the researcher is referring to this time meets the 5/8 level. This is certainly in accordance with what the researcher conveyed regarding one of the measures used by Dewa Alit in the work "Likad". If this rhythmic model is juxtaposed with a quarter pitch pattern which amounts to one beat ( ) then a musical phenomenon will occur which is usually called nyingklak in Balinese gamelan music. The term is understood as a condition when the rhythm or melody seems to be emphasized in the half-beat position above the main tempo (if it is played according to a quarter pitch) which is usually played (sounded) by the kajar instrument. The notation below shows the explanation that the researcher means in this paragraph.

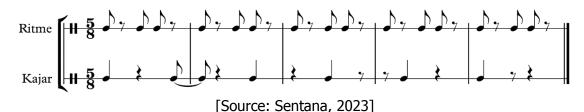
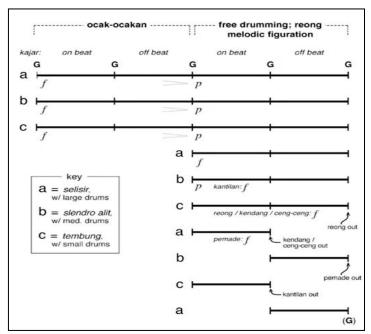


Figure 5. One Model of the Accent Pattern at the Beginning of "Likad"

He has actually started to develop some of the interesting things offered by Dewa Alit since the early 2000s. Based on an interview conducted by researchers on March 29, 2023 at his residence, namely Pondok Salukat, Dewa Alit said that the music that is present today is inseparable from the experience he had when he was "in contact" with various cultures and views in creating. Before he actively worked for the Cudamani gamelan group, Dewa Alit also often performed works by I Wayan Beratha, I Nyoman Windha, Ketut Gede Asnawa, Komang Astita, and works by other composers who were more senior than him. He also admits that his works are inseparable from the influence of these Balinese composers. This can be observed from several of Dewa Alit's works, for example, namely "Gregel" and "Caru Wara". Based on the analysis conducted by Wayne Vitale, that in the work "Gregel" still uses the ruffle motif, namely the interlocking system which tends to be monophonic (a single string of melody, without harmony), in contrast to kotekan which tends to be homophonic, filling a quarter beat of the main tempo. with a plain (on beat) and sangsih (off beat) motif system that processes 1/8 and 1/16 rhythms.



[Source: Vitale, 2020]
Figure 6. Model Analysis Made by Vitale of the Pengadeng Section (Slow Tempo Section) of the work "Geregel"



[Source: Vitale, 2020]

Figure 7. Analysis Model Created by Vitale for the Dye Section of The Work "Geregel"

The work "Caru Wara" also contains a musical sentence which is widely known in Bali as gegenderan. This is reinforced based on the analysis conducted by Pete Steele of the work. The term gegenderan in general (in the concept of kebyaran music composition) can be understood as a musical sentence that contains the playing of the musical texture of the blade-shaped gamelan instrument. Gegenderan contains more complex interlocking patterns, but is still "bound" by rules such as the inclusion of basic melodies (which are colotomic or have cycles of repetition and sentence breaks, marked by the beating of a gong). Then the melody is filled with kotekan (plain and sangsih) which involves four tones according to the saih or patet used.

It can be observed that these two works still contain textures that are still thick with the grammar of the kebyaran genre music, and what is understood as "percussion of new creations". As well as the existence of kebyar, gender, and per-instrument texture play. Dewa Alit's works also still use the traditional Balinese kotekan pattern, both as noted by I Made Bandem (2013) in *Balinese Gamelan on the Stage of History* and other patterns that are widely known among Balinese gamelan musicians.



[Source: Steele, 2020]

Figure 8. Analysis Model Created by Vitale of the Preliminary Part of the Work "Caru Wara"

This is different from the works he created with the Salukat gamelan group and ensemble, especially "Likad" which tends to be influenced by Dewa Alit's interactions with art academics, composers, art observers and foreign artists while teaching gamelan abroad from 2000 until now. Like the kotekan rhythm model by "Likad" described above, this work still applies a plain and sangsih kotekan system but with a different texture, namely by involving tone registers more broadly, in other words far apart. In fact, Dewa Alit started to make a cacophony model like this in his work "Genetik" and in his work "Likad", the cacophony model was developed again.

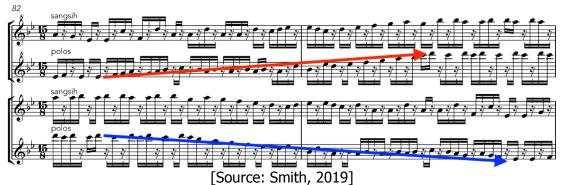


Figure 8. Notation of Two Pairs of Opposite Parts of Cattlean Moving in Opposite to Create a Helical Shape (As if Rotating)

The idea and snippet of the form of the work in the form of chants from the work "Likad" have tried to achieve what is understood as sublime music. This music is said to be a life lesson, reflection, teacher of human life (Dermott, 2013: 34). The Covid-19 incident which claimed many victims, was caused by human oddities, and even human negligence is a life lesson to always weigh our actions and be alert to something urgent that is happening around us. The feeling of not being free during the lockdown process has been tried to be interpreted by Dewa Alit through presenting musical material by "Likad" which is not like "ordinary" Balinese gamelan music, in accordance with the explanation that the author did

above about the material displayed from the work when compared to material Balinese gamelan music in general.

## **Conclusion**

The contents or ideas of the work "Likad" were inspired by human activities that were uncomfortable and not free during the lockdown period. The author observes that Likad's work presents musical material, some of which are kotekan, patterns of blending tones, accents, and structures made with a scheme that avoids Balinese gamelan music in general. The sentence 'avoiding Balinese gamelan music material in general' is of course very reasonable. The use of 7/8, 10/8 measures and so on, coupled with the mostly interlocking pattern, is not at all a return to the common Balinese kotekan scheme. As we know that one of the Balinese kotekan schemes usually fits 2/4, 4/4 or multiples thereof (when viewed in Western music theory).

The author has observed that each generation should give certain things to the next generation with their own identity. Great composers such as I Made Regog, I Wayan Beratha, I Nyoman Windha, and others have their own identity which seems to develop a perception of work from their predecessors. Philosopher Nietzsche once said that, "Only that which has no history can be limited. Stone and wood perhaps have no history and thus can be defined. But art and culture have history, have development, and thus it is difficult to define boundaries."

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