

Tradition Meets Innovation: Asmidar's Journey as a Malaysian Celebrity Singer and Custodian of Irama Asli

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i3/26201>

Published Online: 10 August 2025

Abstract

In this exclusive interview, a renowned Malaysian celebrity singer, Asmidar reflects on her musical journey and the challenges of preserving *Irama Asli* genre in the modern era. As a celebrated figure in the Asli genre, Asmidar shares insights into the unique fusion of tradition and innovation that defines her work. From her early beginnings in the music industry to her commitment to promoting and revitalising *Irama Asli*, she discusses her efforts to bridge cultural heritage with contemporary influences. Asmidar's dedication to maintaining the integrity of Malay music is evident in her approach to performance, composition, and teaching. With a career that spans national and international recognition, she emphasises the importance of fostering awareness, encouraging experimentation, and ensuring the longevity of *Irama Asli* for future generations. This interview offers a compelling look into the life of an artist who is not only a prominent celebrity but also a passionate custodian of Malaysia's rich cultural traditions. It explores how her work contributes to the ongoing preservation and innovation of traditional music, ensuring its relevance in the global music scene. By contextualising Asmidar's role as a bridge between tradition and modernity, this research highlights the significance of artist-driven initiatives in cultural preservation and their impact on the future of traditional Malay music.

Keywords: Asmidar, *Irama Asli*, Traditional Malay Music, Cultural Preservation, Malay Heritage, Music Innovation, Traditional and Modern Fusion, Celebrity Singer, Music Industry, Cultural Identity, Neotrad Music, Performance and Composition, Mek Mulung, Teaching and Mentoring, International Recognition

Introduction

The origins of *Irama Asli* remain ambiguous, with various interpretations surrounding its

history. Some scholars suggest that it represents the musical language of early Malay communities (Bakar, 2022). However, no conclusive evidence has been found to support any of these claims, as the historical origins of this genre are still not definitively established. This challenge in uncovering its roots can be attributed to the absence of written records documenting its history. Despite this, academic works from previous scholars have provided valuable insights into the broader context of traditional Malay music, which can help trace the development of *Irama Asli* (Bakar, 2022).

Irama Asli is a traditional music genre in Malaysia that holds immense cultural significance, representing the essence of the Malay people's musical heritage. The term *Irama Asli* translates to "original rhythm" or "traditional rhythm". It refers to a style of music that has been passed down through generations, preserving the sounds and musical elements of early Malay culture. Deeply embedded in Malaysia's history, *Irama Asli* is often associated with performances such as *Bangsawan* (Malay theatre) and *Dikir Barat* (traditional choir).

Cultural heritage (CH), as defined by Lazarus et al. (2024), involves the continuous transmission of traditions and practices across generations, embodying the collective memory of a society. This includes both tangible and intangible aspects of a culture, inherited from the past, preserved in the present, and passed down for future generations. Such heritage is integral to understanding the role of *Irama Asli* in shaping Malaysia's cultural identity.

The significance of *Irama Asli* as part of Malaysia's cultural heritage is reinforced by research such as that of Mazlan et al. (2020), who analysed the structure and key elements of *Lagu Melayu Asli* in their article *Satu Tinjauan Muzikologi Lagu Melayu Asli*. Their work emphasises that *Lagu Melayu Asli* is a crucial part of Malaysia's musical heritage. As highlighted by Datuk Norliza Rofli, the former Director-General of the Department of Culture and Arts Malaysia (JKKN), *Lagu Melayu Asli* should be embraced as a cultural treasure for Malaysia, akin to how Italians take pride in their opera and classical music (Abdullah, 2015; BERNAMA, 2015, as cited in Mazlan et al., 2020).

This sentiment is echoed by the late Tan Sri S.M. Salim, the renowned Biduan Negara, who advocated for the preservation and promotion of *Lagu Melayu Asli*. He emphasised the scarcity of resources for younger generations to learn and understand these traditional songs, stressing the need to keep this genre alive for future audiences (Astro Awani, 2013, as cited in Mazlan et al., 2020).

Tan Sri S.M. Salim's views highlight an ongoing issue in preserving this genre: the lack of accessible reference materials. This concern is shared by earlier researchers such as Bakar (2014), Arshad (2015), Mohd Rosly (2018), and Isyak (2018), who note that traditional music has often been passed down orally rather than through written records (Mazlan et al., 2020; Mohd Shah, 2013; Bakar, 2014; Arshad, 2015; Mohd Shah & Masumi, 2016; Isyak, 2018; Mohd Rosly, 2018; Ayderova et al., 2020).

This research marks the first step in exploring the life and contributions of a Malaysian singer renowned for her involvement in the *Asli* genre, Asmidar. Norhasmidar binti Ahmad was born on 3rd March 1986 in Kuala Lumpur. Asmidar is a leading figure in the *Asli* music scene. Her journey began at the age of 12 when she recorded the traditional Malay song *Jasa Pak Tani* for

Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), marking the start of her dedication to preserving and promoting the genre.

In 2006, Asmidar's career was solidified when she won the *Bintang Asli Remaja* competition, which helped establish her as a prominent figure in the *Asli* genre. Asmidar's vocal talent and commitment to cultural preservation have garnered significant attention, both locally and internationally. She continued to hone her skills through formal studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and the Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA), majoring in vocal performance and traditional music.

Asmidar's international acclaim was further solidified in 2009 when she won three gold medals, three silver medals, and two bronze medals at the World Championships of Performing Arts in Los Angeles. Her success at this prestigious event helped elevate her reputation as a versatile and accomplished performer. She also became a household name in Malaysia after winning the *Vokal Bukan Sekadar Rupa* reality competition in 2011, with her winning performance *Biar Sampai Ke Bintang* becoming iconic.

Her career continued to flourish with notable performances at prestigious events like the Urbanscape Festival, the Tan Sri P. Ramlee Tribute Concert, and *Anugerah Industri Muzik*. In addition, Asmidar represented Malaysia at the UNESCO Cultural Fest in Paris, showcasing the richness of the *Asli* genre to global audiences.

Recently, Asmidar was invited to perform at the prestigious ASEAN Summit 2025 Gala Night. Reflecting on this remarkable opportunity, she shared her gratitude: "I am extremely grateful and thankful for the invitation and trust given to me to perform at the ASEAN Summit Gala Night 2025. It is a great honour to be part of such a prestigious event. Thank you for the support and this meaningful opportunity, @malaysianphilharmonicorchestra @murizrose. Thank you for the complete trust in me. Thanks also to the Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia Embassies for helping me improve the pronunciation of the songs I performed."

Her performance was also highlighted by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Anwar Ibrahim, in the ASEAN Summit 2025 Gala Night, who stated that the Crown Prince and Premier Li Qiang were amazed by the singer's ability to switch between languages. This shows that Asmidar is a multi-talented and well-versed singer in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, Asmidar expressed her deep gratitude to RTM Malaysia for selecting her as the singer for *Srikandi*_RTM. This powerful song tells the story of a woman's unwavering strength and sacrifices for the love of her family, religion, and country. A celebrated artist with an extensive career, Asmidar has earned recognition for her exceptional vocal talent and dedication to preserving Malaysia's musical heritage.

Her success has been marked by numerous accolades, including her international achievements and iconic performances. With *Srikandi*, she channels the resilience of women who give their all for the greater good. Asmidar hopes that the film, *Srikandi*, will find a special place in the hearts of local audiences, as it celebrates the unyielding spirit of women and their profound impact on society. Through this meaningful project, Asmidar continues to cement her place as one of Malaysia's most influential artists, committed to elevating the country's

cultural identity.

In addition to her performance career, Asmidar remains deeply committed to teaching and mentoring the next generation of musicians. As a lecturer at ASWARA, she focuses on *Mek Mulung*, a traditional form of theatre from Kedah. Through her contributions, Asmidar continues to ensure that *Irama Asli* remains a vibrant and integral part of Malaysia's cultural identity, both locally and internationally.

In this interview, Asmidar reflects on her musical journey, the challenges of promoting traditional Malay music in the modern landscape, and her vision for the future of the *Asli* genre. Through her dedication and influence, Asmidar remains a key figure in the preservation and evolution of Malaysia's musical heritage.

The Interview

NHFA¹

Asmidar, *Irama Asli* is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Malaysia and holds significant importance in the nation's musical heritage. From the perspective of ethnomusicology, how do you perceive the connection between traditional music and Malaysia's cultural identity? How does your work in the *Asli* genre reflect this cultural identity?

AA²

In my opinion, traditional music and Malaysia's cultural identity are closely linked, and they should never be separated. Culture is the foundation from which our identity is formed, and the essence of any nation is drawn from its cultural practices. If culture is lost, the country itself is at risk of losing its identity. No matter how powerful foreign influences become, we must preserve and uphold our own culture because it is what makes us unique. I enjoy experimenting with this idea through my music, blending the old with the new. However, I always make sure to carry that traditional essence with me, no matter where I go. *Neotrad* is an example of how I combine traditional Malay music with contemporary influences while still preserving the core elements. Songs like *Sireh Pinang*, *Biar Sampai ke Bintang*, and *Kita Jumpa Lagi* reflect my deep thought process and show that traditional music can be made relevant even in modern times.

NHFA¹

Irama Asli stands out as one of the most unique forms of traditional Malay music. Compared to other genres like *Ghazal* or *Dikir Barat*, how do you view the current position of *Irama Asli* in terms of popularity, recognition, and cultural relevance?

AA²

I can't deny that *Irama Asli* isn't as popular as it used to be. Nowadays, younger audiences are more familiar with modern traditional music and fusion genres, which tend to cater to their tastes better. As a result, *Irama Asli* is mainly confined to specific events or occasions. In the arts industry, it is seasonal, and there's still a lack of recognition for the pioneers who have contributed to the genre. So, overall, *Irama Asli* is not as prominent as it once was, although it hasn't disappeared completely. This situation has been ongoing for a long time, and the critical question now is: How do we revive it and bring it back into the mainstream?

NHFA¹

Irama Asli is often praised for its emotional depth and storytelling capacity. Could you share how the lyrics and structure of the music in this genre have affected you personally? How do you incorporate these elements into your performances?

AA²

Irama Asli is closely tied to *Bangsawan*, a traditional Malay opera, and is often thought to have originated from it. Because of this, I fully understand the stories behind the lyrics so that I can deliver them more narratively. Often, I imagine myself as a character from one of these *Bangsawan* stories, which helps me convey the emotion behind the songs more vividly. Many *Asli* songs revolve around love, but the way love was expressed in the past is very different from today, due to changes in cultural values and lifestyles. This difference allows me to connect more deeply with the music and helps me deliver a performance that resonates emotionally. This approach works well for me and helps me form a genuine connection with both the songs and my audience.

NHFA¹

You are often praised for your ability to blend traditional and modern elements in your performances. How do you ensure that the authenticity of *Irama Asli* is preserved while still attracting younger audiences and incorporating contemporary influences?

AA²

I enjoy combining old and new elements in my music, but I'm always mindful of preserving the authenticity of traditional elements. To do this, I first study both the traditional and modern aspects of the music to understand their aesthetic values. This allows me to figure out where and how to combine the two elements in a way that feels natural and doesn't feel forced. The fusion should be seamless, not awkward. Before I do this, I make sure I've truly "understood" both elements, because if we only focus on one, the result may become unbalanced. I also seek advice from trusted experts in music production, sound engineering, and musicians. For singing, I turn to my mother, Norasmah Ibrahim, who acts as both a mentor and a third pair of eyes and ears for my projects. It's essential to get feedback from others, but at the same time, we must also balance it with our artistic vision to maintain the originality of the music.

NHFA¹

In this digital age, social media platforms and streaming services have changed the way music is consumed. How do you see these platforms playing a role in preserving traditional music, particularly the *Irama Asli* genre? Do you think these platforms make traditional music more accessible or risk diminishing its cultural value?

AA²

Social media and streaming platforms are essential tools for connecting artists with their audiences. We need to embrace these technological advances to stay relevant, as the industry is moving in that direction. Although it was a challenge at first, it has become second nature now. Many new recordings of traditional Malay songs are now available on these platforms, which is a great thing. Previously, these songs could only be accessed through radio broadcasts or physical media like vinyl or cassettes. Now, anyone can enjoy these songs with just a few

clicks, which makes them far more accessible. I hope that even more traditional music will be made available on these platforms, so that more people can discover and appreciate this vital part of our cultural heritage.

NHFA¹

As an artist committed to preserving traditional Malay music, how do you envision the future of the *Irama Asli* genre in an increasingly globalised world? What steps should be taken to ensure that traditional music not only survives but thrives in the broader global music landscape?

AA²

Irama Asli is a cultural treasure that will endure for generations. It has existed for centuries and is a vital part of our national heritage. The future of this music is in the hands of the younger generation, who must take on the responsibility of preserving and promoting it. We need to do this in several ways: First, by producing as many new works as possible that highlight *Asli* music or other traditional art forms from every ethnic group in Malaysia. Second, we need to refresh old recordings to ensure they are not forgotten and can serve as references for future generations. Third, we must pay attention to the quality of the tapes and aim for a “world music” standard so that our traditional works can stand alongside those from other countries. I believe this is a crucial step in raising the profile of our music on a global stage. Additionally, learning from and collaborating with different cultures will allow us to make comparisons and improvements. Finally, we need to raise awareness of the value of *Irama Asli* among all layers of society, so that it is not forgotten and continues to thrive.

NHFA¹

Malaysia’s cultural heritage has clearly influenced your artistic journey. Who or what has had the most significant impact on your career, particularly regarding your involvement in the *Irama Asli* genre? Are there any key figures, either historical or contemporary, who have shaped your artistic approach?

AA²

Several remarkable individuals have inspired me and motivated me to continue pursuing *Irama Asli*. First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother, Norasmah Ibrahim, who is not only my vocal teacher but also a significant influence in my life. She has guided me in the world of *Asli* music since I was very young. Then, there’s my singing teacher, En. Abd Rahman Kamaruddin, who taught me the nuances of *Asli* singing and also introduced me to other genres like *Ghazal* and *Keroncong*. He is highly respected in the *Asli* music community, and I call him “Bak Man.” Another important figure in my career is En. Rahim Jantan, a legendary *Asli* singer, has mentored me on vocal techniques and music production. These three individuals have played a significant role in shaping my career. There are also others I admire, such as Aspaleta Abdullah, Maaruf Bachik, and R. Ismail, who are all legends in the *Asli* music world. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from them. In other musical genres, I have been influenced by Datuk Syafinaz Selamat, my vocal coach, and Mr. Rafi Mohd, whose expertise in music and arrangements has been invaluable.

NHFA¹

With *Irama Asli* facing challenges in remaining relevant in the modern music scene, how do

you think younger generations can contribute to its future? What role do young musicians and listeners play in ensuring its survival and relevance?

AA²

In today's digital age, producing content that promotes *Irama Asli* is an excellent way to engage the younger generation. Content that is easy to learn and fun can attract new listeners and help keep the genre alive. Due to shifts in societal tastes and the rapid pace of modern life, traditional genres like *Asli* can sometimes appear outdated. To keep it fresh and relevant, we must find ways to incorporate new methods while respecting the traditional roots of the music. Artists have a significant role to play in influencing their audience, and their willingness to experiment with the genre will help introduce it to a broader audience. Many local artists today are bravely exploring new ways to interpret traditional music, and this should be supported.

NHFA¹

Having performed in prestigious venues worldwide, how have international audiences responded to your *Asli* music? Do you believe the *Irama Asli* genre can have an impact on non-Malay listeners, and how can it transcend cultural boundaries?

AA²

From my experience performing abroad, I've noticed that *Asli* music is well-received by international audiences. The genre is rare in many countries, and when presented with traditional costumes, dance, and unique instrumentation, it provides a complete cultural experience. I believe that *Asli* music has the potential to attract non-Malay listeners because of its distinctive sound, both musically and linguistically. To transcend cultural boundaries, I think it needs to be promoted strategically. We can look at countries like South Korea, which have successfully used entertainment as a vehicle to promote their culture. This kind of cultural promotion requires a collective effort and cannot be achieved by an individual alone. I believe it requires a concerted push from our own country to elevate our music on the world stage.

NHFA¹

If you had the opportunity to collaborate with any artist, whether from Malaysia or internationally, who would you choose and why? What do you think such a collaboration could bring to the *Irama Asli* genre while maintaining its cultural authenticity?

AA²

It's always been my dream to bring *Irama Asli* to the international stage, and I would love to collaborate with artists like A.R. Rahman, Hans Zimmer, Billie Eilish, Pharrell Williams, Rosalia, and Coldplay. These are all extraordinary music producers who push the boundaries of creativity. I'd love the opportunity to learn from them and see how they would experiment with *Asli* music. Rosalia, in particular, inspires me because she has maintained her cultural identity while producing new works that have resonated globally. Her success shows that it is possible to stay true to your roots while experimenting and evolving. Coldplay has also experimented with Asian music, and I hope that one day I will have the chance to work with them to bring *Irama Asli* to a global audience. By exploring melodies and rhythms, we might be able to create something new while staying true to the roots of *Irama Asli*.

NHFA¹

Your concerts and showcases, such as 'Asmidarisme Neotrade - The Circle,' are focused on the innovation of *Irama Asli*. How do you balance tradition with innovation to provide a unique musical experience for your audience?

AA²

The creation of the Neotrad music did not come from me alone. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to collaborate with an exceptional producer and arranger like En. Rafi Mohd. He is not only highly experienced as a producer and arranger, but his extensive background in the arts industry has been invaluable in helping me develop the Neotrad concept. Each song that we present has its own story and reason for being chosen. So, the storytelling and arrangement are done based on their suitability, after thorough discussions with En. Rafi Mohd.

Finding the right balance and formula is essential before any musical arrangement is agreed upon. For example, I performed the song *Habanera* from the opera *Carmen*. The brainstorming process began by deciding on the direction to take this European classical piece and adapting it with a Malay flavour. I kept the very popular motif of the song and combined it with modern beats so that the result was not only familiar but also fresh. The question that arose was, if the music was very modern, where should I incorporate the Malay traditional elements? So, it came down to my singing, which remained faithful to the traditional Malay style. For the first part, I sang the original lyrics of the song:

*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
Que nul ne peut apprivoiser
Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle
S'il lui convient de refuser
Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière
L'un parle bien, l'autre se tait
Et c'est l'autre que je préfère
Il n'a rien dit, mais il me plaît
L'amour, l'amour, l'amour, l'amour
L'amour est enfant de bohème
Il n'a jamais, jamais, connu de loi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Et si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
Prends garde à toi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Prends garde à toi
Mais si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
L'amour est enfant de bohème
Il n'a jamais jamais connu de loi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Et si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
Prends garde à toi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Prends garde à toi*

Mais si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
Battit de l'aile et s'envola
L'amour est loin, tu peux l'attendre
Tu ne l'attends plus, il est là
Tout autour de toi, vite, vite
Il vient, s'en va, puis il revient
Tu crois le tenir, il t'évite
Tu crois l'éviter, il te tient
L'amour, l'amour, l'amour, l'amour
L'amour est enfant de bohème
Il n'a jamais jamais connu de loi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Et si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
Prends garde à toi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Prends garde à toi
Mais si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
L'amour est enfant de bohème
Il n'a jamais jamais connu de loi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Et si je t'aime, prends garde à toi
Prends garde à toi
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime
Prends garde à toi
Mais si je t'aime, si je t'aime, prends garde à toi

For the second part of the song, where the melody repeats, I used a Malay *pantun* in a classical singing style, maintaining the traditional Malay vocal styling. I chose a simple *pantun* to make it more fun and easier to listen to:

“Dua tiga kucing berlari,
Mana nak sama si kucing belang,
Dua tiga boleh ku cari,
Mana nak sama cik adik seorang”

This experiment proves that blending melody and language can add a new flavour to an existing song. Even though it is a Western classical genre, if you find the right balance, it can become something extraordinary.

NHFA¹

Could you share your experience working on the *MIKAGE PROJECT ASEAN TOUR 2023*? How did international audiences respond to Malaysian traditional music?

AA²

Working with Mikage was an eye-opening experience for me. I had the opportunity to explore Japanese musical instruments and traditional singing styles, which I then blended with my

own Malay traditional singing. I performed several Malay songs, including *Sireh Pinang (Neotrad)*, *Puteri Santubong* (duet with Mikage), and *Ala Canggung*. I also performed *Kokiriko Bushi*, a traditional Japanese song, in a duet with Mikage. This experience was incredibly valuable because it highlighted the similarities between the two musical traditions, particularly in their soft, melodious nature. The audience responded positively, and after the performance, Mikage invited me to collaborate again. If given the opportunity, I would gladly explore more of Japan's musical culture and find ways to blend it with my own.

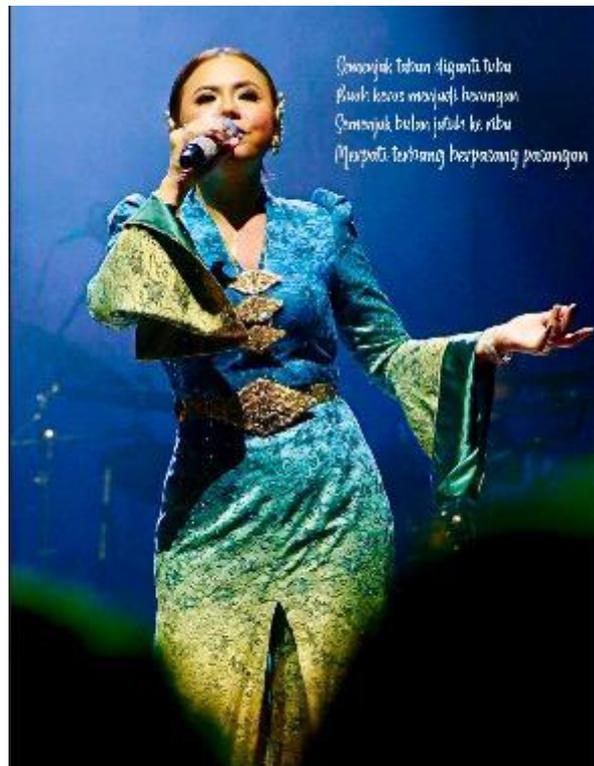


Figure 1. Asmidar in one of her performances

The image features Asmidar, a renowned Malaysian celebrity singer known for her contributions to *Irama Asli* music. In this image, she is captured performing on stage, wearing a traditional Malay costume with a modern twist. The intricate design of her attire, which includes a shimmering blue and green kebaya paired with a decorative belt, showcases the fusion of traditional and contemporary elements often seen in her performances. In the background, there are blurred stage lights and a hint of her band or orchestra, adding to the live performance atmosphere. The text on the image, written in Malay, is a *pantun* (a traditional form of poetry), which adds cultural depth to the visual. The verse reads:

*“Semenjak taban diganti tuba
Buah keras menjadi berangan
Semenjak bulan jatuh ke riba
Merpati terbang berpasang pasangan”*

This *pantun* speaks of a natural and romantic progression, possibly alluding to themes of change, growth, and companionship, which align with the emotional depth often explored in traditional Malay music.

Asmidar's expression in the photo indicates that she is deeply immersed in her performance, demonstrating her connection to the music and her audience. This type of engagement is a hallmark of her ability to merge the rich traditions of *Irama Asli* with modern performance styles.

Asmidar: A Stellar Performance Bridging Tradition and Modernity

The photo captures Asmidar, a prominent Malaysian celebrity singer, performing on stage. In the main image, she is dressed in a striking traditional Malay costume featuring a red top, golden patterned sash, and a shimmering silver shawl. Her radiant smile and engaging stage presence indicate her strong connection with the audience as she performs. Behind her, dancers dressed in vibrant traditional costumes are visible, enhancing the cultural atmosphere of the performance.

The bottom portion of the image features a collage of Asmidar in various looks, showing her versatility in both traditional and contemporary attire. The photos range from casual, chic outfits to more elaborate stage costumes, underscoring her ability to blend modern and traditional fashion seamlessly. This also highlights her diverse roles as a performer, both on and off stage.

Asmidar is known for her deep commitment to preserving and promoting *Irama Asli*, a traditional genre of Malay music, while also incorporating modern influences into her performances. Her diverse career, which includes prestigious international appearances and recognition in the local music scene, places her as a leading figure in Malaysia's music industry. She continues to contribute significantly to the cultural landscape, not just through her music, but also through her teaching and mentorship of aspiring musicians.

These images reflect Asmidar's journey as a celebrated celebrity singer who embodies the fusion of tradition and modernity, showcasing her status as both an artist and a cultural ambassador.



Figure 2. Asmidar, in her style, merges traditional singing and modern singing



Figure 3. Asmidar, when she was performing in the *MIKAGE PROJECT SEAN TOUR 2022*.

Conclusion

Asmidar's journey through the world of *Irama Asli* and traditional Malay music is a testament to her deep-rooted passion for preserving Malaysia's cultural heritage while embracing the evolving dynamics of modern music. Her ability to seamlessly blend the traditional with the

contemporary not only highlights her musical versatility but also strengthens her role as a key figure in the preservation and innovation of *Irama Asli*. Asmidar's influence extends beyond her performances, as she actively contributes to the education and mentorship of the next generation of artists, ensuring that the cultural integrity of Malay music is passed on to future generations.

Through her international recognition and local success, Asmidar continues to be an advocate for cultural preservation and innovation, successfully carrying the legacy of *Irama Asli* onto the global stage. Her unique ability to balance artistic integrity with creativity in her music ensures that *Irama Asli* will continue to thrive, not only in Malaysia but also around the world. Asmidar remains a powerful force in the Malaysian music industry, bridging the gap between tradition and innovation and solidifying her place as both a celebrated artist and a cultural ambassador.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the preservation and innovation of traditional music by focusing on the pivotal role of individual artists, particularly Asmidar, in bridging the gap between cultural heritage and modern musical influences. While much of the current scholarship on traditional music predominantly explore theoretical models of cultural preservation, this study adds a practical dimension by analysing how Asmidar navigates the challenges of blending tradition with innovation in her music. Asmidar's work exemplifies the concept of neotraditionalism, which is the fusion of traditional and contemporary elements, thereby ensuring the relevance of *Irama Asli* in a rapidly changing musical landscape. This study builds on existing research (e.g., Mazlan et al., 2020), which underscores the significance of cultural heritage and highlights the critical role of artist-driven initiatives in preserving and revitalising traditional music for younger generations.

Furthermore, this research expands on the literature by exploring the global context in which *Irama Asli* can thrive, showcasing how Asmidar's contributions have helped elevate the genre beyond local boundaries. Her performances at international events such as the UNESCO Cultural Fest and the ASEAN Summit 2025 exemplify the potential for local music to achieve global recognition. In this regard, the study examines how digital platforms and social media have become essential tools for artists like Asmidar to connect with a broader audience, thereby enhancing the accessibility and sustainability of *Irama Asli* in the modern world.

Through this analysis, the research not only fills a gap in the literature by focusing on individual artists but also offers new insights into how globalisation and digital tools can be leveraged to promote and preserve traditional music. By contextualising Asmidar's work within the framework of cultural preservation and innovation, this study provides a theoretical contribution that emphasises the evolving role of artists in the future viability of traditional genres like *Irama Asli*, ensuring their survival and relevance in the global music scene.

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