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Razak Abdul Aziz's 10 Pantun Settings: Imagery behind the Chosen Texts

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Abstract

10 Pantun Settings is amongst Razak Abdul Aziz's earliest works. Written in the span of 10 years, the texts were chosen from an old poetry book, *Kalong Bunga*, published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1964. Writing music to existing texts has been a common practice since the golden age of art songs in 19th century Europe, with composers such as Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), and Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) dominating this domain, alongside other Western composers. Razak Abdul Aziz's *10 Pantun Settings* uses text found in Za'ba collection of Malay *pantun Kalong Bunga Buku 1* (1964), which was written by Ahmad Abdullah in *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* (1938). This paper focuses on the imagery behind the chosen texts used in this cycle. A series of interviews with the composer is the main method used to achieve the objectives of this study. It is found that the composer's imagery varies – the open space of a Malay traditional house, traditional cake-making, and abandonment (just to name a few). Through this paper, it is hoped that works by Razak Abdul Aziz and other local composers would receive more attention from other scholars and performers alike, as these local gems could potentially shape the identity of Malaysia's unique culture to be passed on to the upcoming, future generations.

Keywords: 10 Pantun Settings, Imagery, Art Song, Razak Abdul Aziz, Composer.

Introduction

10 Pantun Settings is one of Razak Abdul Aziz's earliest works. Composed from 1981 to 1990, this cycle of 10 songs is perhaps the most performed work by this composer in the recent years since receiving its premiere in May 2018. The date and venue of the past performances of the complete works are as follows:

- (i) 4 & 5 May 2018 at Orchestra Hall, Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (henceforth ASWARA) – world premiere

- (ii) 27 August 2018 at Senzoku Gakuen Universiti, Tokyo
- (iii) 8 December 2018 at Paseban Agung, Universiti Sains Malaysia (henceforth USM)
- (iv) 6 February 2020 at Orchestra Hall, ASWARA

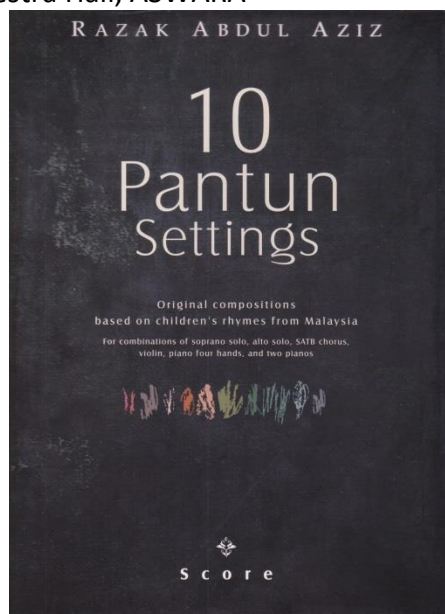


Figure 1 Cover page of *10 Pantun Settings*

Razak began his 10-year journey on *10 Pantun Settings* when he discovered a collection of Malay *pantuns* by Ahmad Abdullah called *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* (1938). The *pantuns* were a part of a compilation of poems which Za'ba assembled in a book called *Kalong Bunga Buku 1* (1964), published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Yoshioka, 2018, p. 47). *Pantun* is a type of rhyming Malay poetry that generally consists of four (4) lines for each stanza (though there are *pantuns* with two, six, and eight lines) in which the first two lines are called *pembayang* and the next two lines are referred to as *maksud* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2017). The *pembayang* lines typically serve as an allusion to the *maksud*, which bears the real message in the poem. In addition, the *pembayang* and *maksud* lines may or may not be directly linked, depending on the message the poet is trying to convey through the *pantun*.

The discovery of the *pantun* collection led Razak to following the art songs tradition of the Western Classical works (Razak received his academic training in this type of music), where composers took existing texts (usually poems) written by various poets to be a source of inspiration and set music to the chosen texts. This is discussed further in the next section of this paper with citations on some important works in the art song genre.



Figure 2 Cover page of *Kalong Bunga*

A brief background of the composer; Razak Abdul Aziz is a Malaysian musician and former academician. As a composer, Razak had started composing music since the 1980s (Hall, 1988, p. 30). He received his academic training at Skidmore College in the USA as an undergraduate and pursued his studies to postgraduate levels at Columbia University, USA and University of Edinburgh in the UK.

As a composer, he had produced many works. Based on interviews conducted by the researchers with the composer on 24 November 2018 and 30 March 2020, it is known that the following are the works by Razak so far:

- (i) *5 Early Songs* for voice and piano (1980-1988)
- (ii) *Quintet* for strings (1981)
- (iii) *10 Pantun Settings* for combinations of soprano solo, alto solo, SATB chorus, violin, piano four hands, and two pianos (1981-1990)
- (iv) *For Violin and Piano* for violin and piano (1982, revised 2019)
- (v) *The Wedding* for Orchestra (1986)
- (vi) *Do Take Muriel Out* for soprano solo, alto solo, SSAA chorus, and orchestra (1994)
- (vii) *Etudes* for solo piano (2002)
- (viii) opera *Maria Zaitun* for voices and chamber orchestra (2002)
- (ix) *The Fisherman* for solo voice, chorus, and chamber ensemble or piano (2015)
- (x) *Pepatah Episodes* for solo piano (2019)
- (xi) *Prisms No. 1 and 2* for 1 piano 4 hands (2019-2020)
- (xii) *Haiku* for soprano solo, SATB chorus, and piano (2020)

As an academic, Razak Abdul Aziz had served at Jabatan Muzik Institut Teknologi MARA (now known as Universiti Teknologi MARA, or UiTM) Shah Alam from 1986 to 1993. He taught music theory, composition, and piano courses, among others. In addition, he also formed a vocal group that consisted of music undergraduate students called ITM Singers, where Razak assumed the position of the conductor of the vocal group. He then made the decision to tenure at the School of the Arts (SOTA) USM Pulau Pinang in 1993 until his retirement in November 2019, responding to an invitation made by a renowned ethnomusicologist, Tan Sooi Beng, and at the same time returning to his hometown to be closer to his family (Zamani et al, 2019, p. 76).

Though Razak had retired from his academic life, he is still active in writing music. In his own words, "Now that I have retired, I have more time to focus on writing music" (Razak Abdul Aziz, 6

February 2020, personal interview). Razak plans to compose new music and record his works, alongside promoting his existing works by engaging with various local and international artists.

The next section reviews some important works of art songs by past composers with cited works by Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Hugo Wolf, Francis Poulenc, and Razak Abdul Aziz himself. This is done for the purpose of discussing the tradition of art songs, before proceeding to the findings of this study.

Review

This review briefly discusses the tradition of art songs. Citing works by Franz Schubert (1797-1828), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), and Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), it attempts to relate those works to the centerpiece of this paper. This is important to show how Razak Abdul Aziz had followed the great tradition of art songs in his work *10 Pantun Settings*: adapting texts from Ahmad Abdullah's *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* and narrating a story, which is similar to what past composers had done in their art songs.

The art song genre is one of the most distinctive forms of music in the Romantic era (1820-1900) and this tradition could be traced back to the Middle Ages. In Shakespeare's England, for example, the poetry and music of the English Renaissance were brought into madrigals and other musical forms by Elizabethan composers such as John Dowland (Estrella, 2019). The revival of this form of music happened because composers were losing their jobs as resident artists. This is due to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, forcing composers to become free artists. As a result, composers begin to write music primarily for a middle-class audience whose size and prosperity had increased, hence the number of people wanting to hear and play music was greater than before. This gave rise to salon concerts, where solo and chamber music (including art songs) were played at these venues (Kamien, 2000, pp. 309-310).

When discussing art songs, it is inevitable to mention Franz Schubert (1797-1828). With his great collections of art songs such as *Winterreise*, *Die schöne Müllerin*, and *Schwanengesang*, he was responsible in bringing art songs into the limelight of Western Classical music. Firstly, he incorporated texts by significant German poets of the time, amongst them Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827), and Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). Schubert then narrated a story by setting his music to the chosen poems for each cycle. For instance, in *Die schöne Müllerin*, Schubert adapted 20 poems by Müller in his collection of poems by the same name and wrote a cycle of 20 art songs. Though Schubert omitted five (5) poems from the original collection in his cycle, he decided to keep the original narrative of the poem collection (Youens, 1992, p. 42). Schubert was also responsible in establishing the earlier musical forms used in this form of art, which are strophic, modified strophic, and through-composed (Kamien, p. 316).

Another great composer, Robert Schumann (1810-1856) also followed this tradition. One of his most substantial collections of art songs, *Dichterliebe*, used texts from *Lyrisches Intermezzo* by Heinrich Heine. Even though there is no actual narrative in the original collection, Schumann took 12 of the 65 poems in this collection and created his own narration (Komar, 1971, p. 5). In Schumann's version, this person puts the old bad songs and dreams, all his sorrowful love and suffering into a huge casket, in which twelve giants throw into the sea at the end of the cycle.

This tradition continues to the later era. This is evident by examining the art songs written in the 20th century by many Western Classical composers. A good example is the song cycle *Le Bestiaire*

by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963). Poulenc composed six (6) songs to six (6) chosen poems (though he initially had chosen 12 poems) by Guillaume Apollinaire's (1880-1918) *Le Bestiaire ou Cortège d'Orphée* (Poulenc, 1920, pp. 1-8), a collection of 30 short poems (Willhardt et al, 2000, p. 14). In these poems, Apollinaire describes semi-mythical animals. Poulenc decides to keep this description in his music, writing 6 short songs to the chosen texts. Written originally for solo voice and chamber orchestra, the composer later reduced this song cycle to solo voice and piano.

This brief review demonstrates how composers in the past had adapted texts from poets into their song cycles: they either maintained the original narrative or narrated their own stories from the chosen texts. In the next section, the discussion centres around Razak Abdul Aziz's *10 Pantun Settings*. It shows the poems Razak had selected from Abdullah Ahmad's *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* as the literary source, alongside the imagery the composer had in mind while writing each song in this cycle.

Findings

As mentioned earlier, Razak Abdul Aziz had chosen 10 poems from Ahmad Abdullah's *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* to be the text for the cycle *10 Pantun Settings*. For each song, the chosen poems were written in its original Malay text together with English translations by Patricia Matusky and Badriyah Salleh, followed by Razak's imagery using related images for better understanding and feasibility.

Buai Adik (Sway, Child)

Table 1. *Buai Adik* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Ayun adik, ayun, Ayun sampai laju, Bangun adik, bangun, Bangun pakai baju.	Sing, child swing, Swing faster and faster, Awake, child awake, Awake and get dressed.
Baju bercekak musang, Corak belang sawa, Hendak menghebat tuning, Hendak senyum dengan ketawa.	A shirt with a Malay collar, A shirt with stripes, Go impress your loved one Go and smile with laughter.
Di pangkal pulai muda, Ada sarang induk tupai, Datang kapal dengan nakhoda, Tanda dagangan sudah sampai.	At the bottom of the young <i>Pulai</i> tree, Is the mother squirrel's nest, A ship arrives with its captain, A sign that trade has arrived.

The first song in this cycle was written in 1981. The composer imagined a woman swaying her child in a cradle when he read this poem. Imagining someone with a sad life, this woman tries to hide her feelings by being reserved and not showing her emotions. It is possible that the narration of the cycle revolves around this woman, as she will appear in the last song to conclude the narrative (though the composer never mentioned this explicitly during any of the interviews). This imagery of the sad woman had inspired Razak Abdul Aziz to use this *pantun* and set the music to that of a lullaby. However, the text may suggest otherwise as the lullaby was to be sung without any feeling. Razak

Abdul Aziz also tries to emulate the sense of space of typical old Malay house in his music with the use of moderately slow tempo.

Razak Abdul Aziz

Very slow, almost without feeling ($\text{♩} = 48-52$)

l

Voice

p

A - yun a - dik, a - yun,

Piano

p

Figure 3 Opening bars of *Buai Adik*



Figure 4 Open space of a traditional Malay house

Buat Kuih (Cake Making)

Table 2. *Buat Kuih* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Ada satu baulu, Pecah telur dalam pasu, Dilebuk dengan lidi baru, Sudah masak, orang tua pilih dulu.	There is a <i>baulu</i> cake, Break and egg into a bowl, Beat the eggs with a whisk, When it is baked, the elders choose first.
Buah Melaka ke atas gugur, Di luar tepung, di dalam gula, Digolek-golek kelapa kukur, Budak-budak sangat suka.	Molasses on top of crumbs, Batter on the outside, sugar in the inside, All rolled on grated coconuts, All children really like it.
Satu kuih cucur kodok, Masaknya berbentuk-bentuk, Sudah masak dicucuk-cucuk, Banyak dimakan mata mengantuk.	A small fried banana cake, Made in various forms, Baked on bamboo skewers, Eat a lot and you fall asleep.
Satu lagi kuih koci, Bungkusnya tiga segi, Di luar tepung, di dalam inti, Dimakan orang tua tak bergigi.	Another cake the <i>kuih koci</i> , Wrapped in a triangle shape, Outside is the batter, inside is the filling, Old folks without teeth eat it.

The second song in this cycle, *Buat Kuih*, was composed in 1982. Very playful in character, one can say that *Buat Kuih* was composed with certain imageries in mind. The motoric rhythm of this piece is written using continuous semiquaver figures in the piano parts during the first half of the song, depicting the action and sound of whisking cake ingredients in a traditional mixing bowl made from clay (*pasu/guri*). The excerpt below is an example of this continuous rhythm, which could be heard throughout this agitated first section.

Razak Abdul Aziz

Lively, full of excitement (♩ = 80 - 88) [Tempo I]
With uncontrolled agitation *ff*

Voice

Bu - - - - dak - bu - dak sa - ngat su -

Lively, full of excitement (♩ = 80 - 88) [Tempo I]
Clumsily *ff*

Pn. 1

Lively, full of excitement (♩ = 80 - 88) [Tempo I]
Clumsily *ff*

Pn. 2



Figure 5 Continuous semiquaver figures in the piano parts



Figure 6 Traditional mixing bowl

The composer also incorporates the use of repetitive rhythmic motifs as a binding element in the vocal part, as demonstrated in Figures 7 and 8, showing the two repetitive rhythmic motifs used. The first figure is repeated throughout the first section, while the second rhythmic figure is shorter than the first one, giving more opportunity to be manipulated and combined in different ways.



Figure 7 First rhythmic motif



Figure 8 Second rhythmic motif

With the combination of the motoric rhythm on the piano parts and the rhythmic motifs on the vocal line, these elements contribute to creating the excitement of this song; imitating the sounds made during a traditional cake-making process which are playful and almost child-like at times.

The music then comes to a temporary halt, marking the beginning a new, contrasting section. Here, the composer imagines a child getting lazy and sleepy from gluttonously over-eating the cakes made. The tempo used here is slow, while incorporating more passive rhythms in both the voice and piano parts. A soft dynamic is also used to enhance the imagery desired by the composer.

70 Unconcernedly

cah te - lur da - lam pa - su, hoi! Sa - tu ku - ih

Slow, lazily (♩ = 63-72) [Tempo II]
Saucily

p

Pn. 1 *piu mf*

Pn. 2 *mf* *pp*

Slow, lazily (♩ = 63-72) [Tempo II]

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for a song. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 70 with the tempo marking 'Unconcernedly'. The lyrics are 'cah te - lur da - lam pa - su, hoi! Sa - tu ku - ih'. The tempo changes to 'Slow, lazily (♩ = 63-72) [Tempo II]' and 'Saucily' with a dynamic of *p*. The middle staff is for Piano 1 (Pn. 1), with a dynamic of *piu mf*. The bottom staff is for Piano 2 (Pn. 2), with a dynamic of *mf* in the first part and *pp* in the second part. The tempo marking 'Slow, lazily (♩ = 63-72) [Tempo II]' is repeated above the Pn. 2 staff.

Figure 9 Transition from lively and agitated to passive and slow section

Though this passive section lasts for only 10 bars, it acts as the connector between the earlier and next sections, as both sections share the same character. The music then gradually reverts to its initial agitation and reaching the same pace as the first section.

82 Ritenuto ----- A Tempo [Tempo II] Accelerando -----

Amused *mf* ber - ben - tuk ben - tuk. Ba - nyak di - ma - kan ma - ta me ngan - tuk. -----

Tempo II Accelerando -----

Pn. 1 *mf*

Pn. 2 Ritenuto ----- A Tempo [Tempo II] Accelerando -----

mf

85 Tempo 1 *f* Eagerly *f* Sa - tu la - gi ku -

Tempo 1 *f*

Pn. 1 *f*

Tempo 1 *f*

Pn. 2 *f*

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system (measures 82-84) features a vocal line and two piano staves (Pn. 1 and Pn. 2). The tempo starts with 'Ritenuto', moves to 'A Tempo [Tempo II]', and ends with 'Accelerando'. The mood is 'Amused' and the dynamic is 'mf'. The lyrics are 'ber - ben - tuk ben - tuk. Ba - nyak di - ma - kan ma - ta me ngan - tuk.' The piano accompaniment includes chords and rhythmic patterns. The second system (measures 85-87) starts with 'Tempo 1' and 'f' (forte), with the mood 'Eagerly'. The lyrics are 'Sa - tu la - gi ku -'. The piano accompaniment features a driving eighth-note pattern in both hands.

Figure 10 Reverting to the lively and agitated character

Mandi-Mandi (Bathing)

Table 3. Mandi-Mandi text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Ketam berdayung-dayung Rama-rama berkemudi Kembangkanlah payung, Anak raja turun mandi.	The crabs paddle along, The butterflies flutter in a line, Open the umbrella, A royal child is bathing.
Moh ke sana, menyelam, Di sana tempat dangkat, Air penuh, hati geram, Baik kita pergi cepat.	Come along, let us dive, Over there it is shallow, At high tide, we are all eager, Quickly let us go.

Mandi-Mandi (1984) is the third song in this cycle. Written for voice, violin, and piano, it is the most extroverted song in the entire cycle (in the composer’s own words). It is also the only song in the entire cycle that incorporates a violin as a collaborative partner. This short-in-length piece is imbued with several layers. The rhythm in the opening bars, primarily in places with accents on off-beats, are his imagery of Egyptian paintings and hieroglyphics walking and moving haltingly as best as they can from one place to another. They move obediently in one line, but their movements are sometimes halted. Their gait is clumsy and comical, thus the off beats accents. In achieving the clumsy, halting movements of the Egyptian hieroglyph, off-beat accents in a loud dynamic were written down for this instrument, adding the already similar music character in the piano part. This music gesture mostly appears when the voice is at rest.



Figure 11 Opening bars with off-beat accents



Figure 12 Egyptian wall paintings

When the voice starts singing, the music then takes us to a different setting. Here, one could imagine the village children role-playing in a game of make-believe. They pretend to be princes and princesses in a world so different from theirs. The notes and rhythms here are light and dainty, thus the light staccato of the piano and the mildly stressed staccatos of the violin. The Egyptian idea in the opening section makes its last appearance after the voice has finished singing its final line (*baik kita pergi cepat*), in which the children are brought back to reality; realising that they are not princes and princesses, but rather plain village children playing this game of make-believe.

Figure 13 The final bars of *Mandi-Mandi*

Jangan Tengok Kami (Do Not Look at Us)

Table 4. *Jangan Tengok Kami* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Ayam denak dani, Makan petang-petang, Jangan tengok kami, Kami baru datang.	The wild chickens, Eat in the afternoon, Don't look at us, We have just come.
Ayam denak dani, Makan buah pauh, Jangan tengok kami, Kami orang jauh.	The wild chickens, Eat mangoes, Don't look at us, We are from afar.
Ayam denak dani, Makan biji jagung, Jangan tengok kami, Kami orang punjung.	The wild chickens, Eat corn seeds, Don't look at us, We are common people.

The fourth song in this cycle, *Jangan Tengok Kami* (1984), has an interesting imagery. Razak imagines two groups of villagers, in which each group is carrying two crossed pairs of bamboo sticks. These two groups coincidentally meet at a junction. None of them wants to yield, thus they lay down their bamboo sticks and break into a duel, challenging each other with their skills in *magunatip*¹ dance. With this imagery in mind, the composer transformed the percussive sound of the bamboo dance into two pianos; Piano 1 and Piano 2 by using loud dynamics and a lot of accents beats, mimicking the bamboo sound.

Razak Abdul Aziz

The musical score is for the song 'Jangan Tengok Kami' by Razak Abdul Aziz. It consists of three staves: Voice, Piano 1 (Pn. 1), and Piano 2 (Pn. 2). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Fast, Percussive (♩ = ca. 84-100) [Tempo I]'. The piano parts are marked with a forte dynamic 'f'. The piano parts feature complex rhythmic patterns with many accents, mimicking the sound of bamboo sticks. The score includes a first ending bracket for the piano parts, ending at measure 16.

¹ traditional bamboo dance of Murut people of Sabah.

Figure 14 2 pianos playing percussively



Figure 15 *Magunatip* dance of Murut people of Sabah

When the singer starts singing, a different ambience is noticed. The singer sings decisively, and asks not to be looked at. Almost like a recitative, this part is not accompanied; changing the music texture to monophonic, perhaps mimicking the persuasion of a person telling these groups to negotiate and not to carry on with the duel. However, the villagers ignored him and remain dueling against each other, despite the reiterations by this person to get the peace message across.

Decisively

f

A - yam de - nak da - ni, ___ Ma - kan pe - tang pe - tang; ___

Figure 16 Unaccompanied vocal line

Figure 17 shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The score includes a vocal line and two piano accompaniment parts (Pn. 1 and Pn. 2). The vocal line starts at measure 9 and features the lyrics "Jan-gan ten-gok ka-mi, Ka-mi ba-ru da-tang". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, Pn. 1 and Pn. 2, with complex rhythmic patterns and chordal structures. The time signature changes from 8/8 to 4/4 and back to 8/8.

Figure 17 The duel continues and the voice reiterating its effort

This aggression of the bamboo duel and decisive singing continues and reaches its climax, before a complete silence breaks the fight. This is probably a mimic of exhaustion due to the long and intense duel.

The section that follows takes the compositional direction to an unusual turn. Reiterating the same text used in previous section, the music is set with an imagination of grand palaces. The dueling villagers are now taken to *istana kayangan* (celestial palace) with all the grandeur and majestic glory in their dreams. The music becomes expansive and the singer sings with regal splendour.

Figure 18 shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The score includes a vocal line and two piano accompaniment parts (Pn. 1 and Pn. 2). The vocal line starts at measure 67 and features the lyrics "Ka-mi ba-ru da-tang". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, Pn. 1 and Pn. 2, with complex rhythmic patterns and chordal structures. The tempo is marked "Imposingly (♩ = ca. 52-60) [Tempo III]". The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* and *f*.

Figure 18 The exhaustion, followed by the shift to *istana kayangan*

But like all dreams, this too ends too soon. The villagers are now taken back to reality. They now realise that they could perhaps come to a compromise as they share a lot of things in common,

and that no one group has complete authority over the other. Some elements from the aggressive duel section can be heard here, as the composer intends for the listeners to reminisce on the initial idea of this piece.

83 In an unpretentious manner and with a deep sense of humility

A - yam de - nak da - ni, Ma - kan bi - ji ja - gung;

The image shows a musical score for a piece. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in 8/4 time, starting at measure 83. The lyrics are 'A - yam de - nak da - ni, Ma - kan bi - ji ja - gung;'. The middle two staves are for piano accompaniment, labeled 'Pn. 1' and 'Pn. 2'. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, with some accidentals. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

Figure 19 Returning to reality

Sorok-Sorok (Hide and Seek)

Table 5. *Sorok-Sorok* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Tam-tam buku, Kerakap daun pudding, Siapa hendak suku, Tangkap bulu kucing.	Hit, hit the fist, Old dried pudding leaves, Whoever wants to be part of the group, Catch the knob on the cat's tail.
Pit-pit! Patah paku, patah puting, Cari aku balik dinding.	Pit-pit! Break the nail, break the handle, Find me behind the wall.
Cak liku buku tebu, Cari aku balik pintu, Hantu kopek ada situ, Kopek besar, takut aku!	Chew on the sugarcane stem, Look for me behind the door, The big breasted ghost is there, A big breasted ghost, I am afraid!
Kap-kap hudang, Di mana serampang hendak jatuh? Di lubuk ikan banyak. Um-m-m pecak!	The shell of the prawn, Where has the spear gone? In the pool where there are many fish. Um-m-m I got the fish!

Sorok-Sorok (1987) is perhaps the most colourful work in the entire collection. Imagining a married couple playing a child's game of hide and seek, this composition has various sections to depict different parts of the game, before the couple became intimate. For example, the pompous opening played by Piano 1 and Piano 2 is to depict the husband chasing the wife around the traditional Malay house (usually made of wood).

Razak Abdul Aziz

1

Voice

Pesante, ♩ = ca. 132

Pn. 1

ff

Meno pesante

f

Pesante, ♩ = ca. 132

Pn. 2

ff

Meno pesante

f

8vb-

Figure 20 Pompous opening mimicking clenched fist hitting

Through interviews conducted between the researchers with Razak Abdul Aziz, it was revealed that the composer did not fix certain imageries with the sections in this song. The reason being he wanted the performers and listeners to imagine different stages of this adult hide and seek game with the music. However, he did give some examples of imageries he personally associated with certain sections. This allows for various interpretations of imageries, perhaps having the slower sections being the scene where the wife is hiding in the *kelambu* (mosquito net), teasing her husband to join her. The agitated, pompous sections could be imagined as the couple running around the house, being playful towards each other.

Figure 21 is a musical score excerpt from a slow section. It features a vocal line at the top and piano accompaniment (Pn. 1 and Pn. 2) below. The vocal line starts at measure 17 with the lyrics "Si - a - pa - hen - dak su - ku,". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, Pn. 1 and Pn. 2, with various musical notations including triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like *Tea*. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8.

Figure 21 Excerpt from a slow section

The song ends with the pianos accelerating towards the end with loud rumbles, before taking a long pause to give way to the vocal cadenza, singing on the words *Um pecak!*. Seeing the journey from the beginning of the song, it could be possible that this cadenza is mimicking the laughter and giggles of the wife, who in the end gets caught by her husband and they finally became intimate.

Figure 22 is a musical score excerpt showing a vocal cadenza and piano accompaniment starting at measure 82. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "U - - - - - um, Pe - cak!". Above the vocal line, there is a dynamic marking *f* and a tempo instruction "Start slowly and then accelerate". The piano accompaniment (Pn. 1 and Pn. 2) features a *fff* dynamic marking and a tempo instruction "senza ritardando". The piano accompaniment includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and dynamic markings. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

Figure 22 Vocal cadenza

Pinjam Dandang (Borrowing the Rice Steamer)

Table 6. *Pinjam Dandang* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Mak Uda! Mak Uda! Pinjam saya dandang.	Young Aunty! Young Aunty! Lend me your rice steamer.
Buat apa nak guna dandang? Mak saya nak jamu orang.	Why do you want the rice steamer? My mother wants to prepare a feast.
Buat apa nak jamu orang? Saya nak kahwin petang karang.	Why does she want to prepare a feast? I am getting married this afternoon.
Berapa hari nak jamu orang? Petang karang dengan petang esok.	How many days is the feast? This evening and tomorrow evening.

Pinjam Dandang (1988) is a conversation between two (2) characters – a young girl who is playing a make-believe game, and her aunt, Mak Uda. This song is written for two soloists, two pianos, an SATB chorus, and a percussion ensemble. Razak Abdul Aziz was inspired by a traditional shadow theatre from Kelantan, *wayang kulit*, when composing this song.



Figure 23 Kelantanese *Wayang kulit*

In traditional Kelantanese *wayang kulit* play, the story would usually be about royalties and fairy tales, spoken in Kelantanese Malay dialect. Hence, the opening act begins with a slow, regal music, setting up the mood of the play for the audience. The opening act element is incorporated in this song, giving the introduction a majestic introduction played by the two pianos. It sets the ambience right, with the imagery of curtains rising at the beginning of this piece.

Exotically
♩ = ca 56

Piano 1

Piano 2

Exotically
♩ = ca 56

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Figure 24 Majestic opening

Imagining colloquial conversation of the characters, Razak Abdul Aziz demands the *sprechstimme* singing style² from the soloists for certain parts in this song. This is written using a cross on the music stem. The singers need to sing the written pitch ‘half spoken, half sung’ (colloquial and without vibrato). Oftentimes in this song, this singing style occurs when the main characters (the young girl and Mak Uda) are having a conversation with each other. The excerpt below shows an example of this conversation.

♩ = ca 84

Seemingly indifferent

Anxiously

Bu-at a-pa_nak_gu-na dan-dang?

Mak sa-ya nak ja-mu o-rang.

Figure 25 Sprechstimme vocal line

The soloists are to sing with their normal voices when they do not see this type of music notation in their score.

The composer also imagined a child’s game of ‘follow the leader’ in this song. He uses the choir to emulate this, where the soloist would be saying something prior and the chorus imitates right after, repeating the phrase a few times. This could be seen throughout the piece. Figures 26 and 27 demonstrate this imitation between the solo singer and chorus.

² A singing style first introduced in the music literature by Arnold Schoenberg in the early 20th century.



Pinjam sa - ya dandang. | _

Figure 26 Soprano solo



Figure 27 Alto imitating immediately

This game of word imitation comes to its climax when each voice in the chorus reiterates their individual line simultaneously; creating accents at unusual beats in the music and emulating children making noise while playing this game.



Figure 28 Chorus imitating children making noise

The composer ends this song with the same material he had used in the opening bars. While the curtains were raised during the opening of this song and remained there during the whole 'make-believe' game, they eventually would have to be brought down; marking the end of this song. Just like in a *wayang kulit* play, the ending has the same music with its opening.

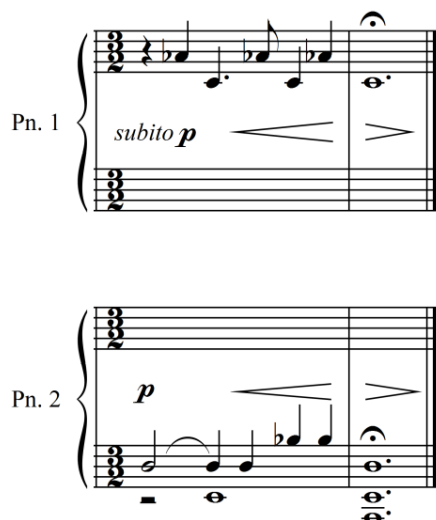


Figure 29 The last bars of *Pinjam Dandang*

Lumba Berkejar (Chasing, otherwise known as ‘Tag’)

Table 7. *Lumba Berkejar* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Keng! Keng! Kejar aku, Siapa cepat dia dulu.	Keng! Keng! Chase me, Whoever is fast, he is first.
Keng! Keng! Kejar kuat, Tangkap kelingking kalau dapat.	Keng! Keng! Chase faster, Catch my little finger if you can.
Ikan terubuk, ikan tenggiri, Orang gemuk tak kuat berlari.	The <i>terubuk</i> fish, the <i>tenggiri</i> fish, The fat one can't run fast.
Tebag tebu junjung jubi, Badan gebu makan ubi.	Cut the sugarcane stem, The fat one eats potatoes.
Ikan panggang, ikan gulai, Kawan pegang jangan mengilai.	Grilled fish, curry fish, If your friends touch you, don't giggle.
Buah keranji masam kelat, Tidakku bagi awak dekat.	Very bitter <i>keranji</i> fruit, I will not let you come near.
Hoi! Pegang, pegang! Dapat! Aku menang, awak lambat!	Hoi! Catch, catch! Got you! I win, you're late.

Written for a soloist, SATB chorus, and 2 pianos, *Lumba Berkejar* (1988) depicts a girl (the soloist) running from a group of people (SATB chorus). As this person is running away, she makes fun of the people, calling them fat and not able to make a run, challenging them to catch her by her little

finger. The composer portrays this mean imagery through the use of fully spoken lines with derogatory words.

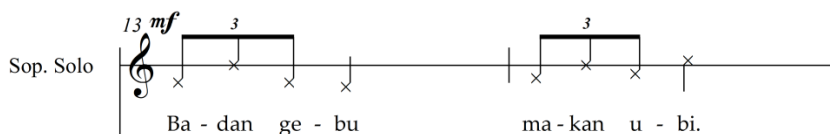


Figure 30 Fully spoken line

The composer also imagined the chorus to be moving like *kuda kepang*³ dancers – moving only from side to side.



Figure 31 Kuda Kepang

This movement of the ‘fat people chorus’ is being translated into music through a descending melody in a whole tone pattern, going one tone lower from the preceding bar, decreasing in dynamics.

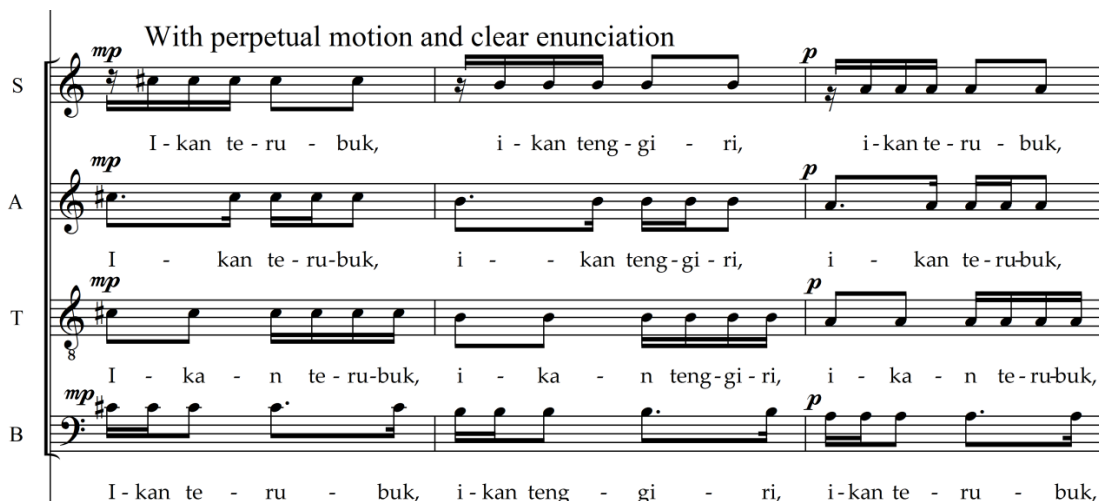


Figure 32 ‘Fat people’ chorus

³ A dance form that is prominent in the southern peninsular of Malaysia.

As the movement of *kuda kepang* is only from side-to-side, it is impossible for the group to get to this person. Hence, the distance between her and this group gets bigger and bigger, eventually giving her an easy win for the run, leaving them far behind.

This song ends with the final mockery, reiterating her challenge towards the group to ‘catch her by her little finger’. This insinuates an insult towards them for not being able to get to her.

The image shows a musical score for the final bars of a piece. It consists of four staves: Soprano Solo (Sop. Solo), Piano 1 (Pn. 1), and Piano 2 (Pn. 2). The Soprano Solo part is in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Tang - kap ke - ling - king ka - lau da - pat." The Piano 1 part is in treble clef, and the Piano 2 part is in bass clef. Both piano parts are also marked with mp. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 33 Final bars of *Lumba Berkejar*

Kalau Salah Jangan Malu (If Wrong, Don't Be Shy)

Table 8. *Kalau Salah Jangan Malu* text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Singkap langsir tingkap, Tinjau Busu lalu, Sama kawan boleh cakap, Kalau salah jangan malu.	Push the curtains aside, See Busu passing by, With friends you can always speak, Even if you are wrong, don't be shy.
Tinjau Busu lalu, Tampak balik bukit, Kalau salah jangan malu, Bawa senyum gelak sedikit.	See Busu passing by, Barely visible behind the hill, If wrong, don't be shy. Carry a smile and laugh a little.

The only song in this entire cycle that is dedicated to an SATB chorus, Razak Abdul Aziz imagined the scenery of a funfair when writing *Kalau Salah Jangan Malu* (1986). As a young boy, he was often dazzled by the sight of the carousel at the funfair. The coloured lights and the repetitive but hypnotic tunes all added to the happy atmosphere at the fairground. In the composer's own words:

And when I fixed my eyes on the gentle spinning of the merry-go-round, I felt as if I was transported to a whole other world – a magical world that allowed me to indulge in myself, at least for a while (Razak Abdul Aziz, 8 December 2018).

This song begins with bass lines that split two ways: the left hand of Piano 2 moving downwards, immediately followed by the right hand of Piano 1 sweeping upwards. This is a reminiscence of his first experience walking into the fairground and seeing a carousel.

Dark and sombre but gradually getting brilliant.

Pn. 1

Dark and sombre but gradually getting brilliant.

Pn. 2

f

f

8^{va}

Figure 34 Reminiscence of the composer’s first experience on the fairground

This passage is then continued with Piano 1 playing repeated broken-chord excerpts on both hands, inspired by the music and the mixture of colours produced by the whirling lights of the carousel, thus producing a trance-like ambience.

Pn. 1

(8^{va})

Figure 35 Carousel music



Figure 36 Carousel

Among other things Razak Abdul Aziz remembered during this visit to the funfair was being mesmerised by the colourful balloons released into the sky. The composer transformed this imagery into a descending-ascending arpeggio-like notes spread across the keyboard that gradually becomes more elaborate, played by Piano 2.



Figure 37 Arpeggiated notes imitating balloons released into the sky



Figure 38 Balloons

The composer also imagined the loud music at the funfair and noisy, overlapping conversation between the goers through the canon writing in the SATB chorus, imitating each other.

The musical score illustrates canon writing in a SATB choir. It consists of four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are: S: Tin-jau Bu - su, Tam-pak; A: Tin-jau Bu-su la - lu, Tam-pak ba - lik; T: Tin-jau Bu-su la - lu, Tampak ba-lik bu - kit; Ka-lau sa - lah; B: Tin-jau Bu-su la - lu, Tampak ba - lik bu - kit; The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and rests.

Figure 39 Canon writing in the SATB choir

Lan, Kula Inson Lan (You and Me)

Table 9. Lan, Kula Inson, Lan text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Lan, Kula Inson, Lan, Berlayar berbelok-belok, Cincinku patah sembilan, Terlanggar naga di teluk.	You and me, Sailing right and left, My ring is broken in nine pieces, Striking the dragon by the bay.
Kayuh sampan, kayuh! Kayuh laju-laju, Adik jangan gaduh, Emak tengah pakai baju.	Row sampan row! Row faster and faster, Do not quarrel, Mother is getting dressed.

As a child, Razak Abdul Aziz always loved looking at fairy-tale illustrations and reading the story. *Lan Kula Inson Lan* (1990) was written with this in tone, reminiscing what Razak Abdul Aziz had felt in his early years. For the most part, the composer thought the poem evokes fleeting moments of permanency. This is translated into swift musical passages in the introduction, middle, and closing sections.

The musical score for Figure 40 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Voice, with the instruction 'Effortlessly, ♩ = ca. 200'. The middle staff is for Piano 1 (Pn. 1), and the bottom staff is for Piano 2 (Pn. 2). Both piano parts feature dynamic markings of *f* and *mf* with hairpins indicating crescendos and decrescendos. The music is written in a complex, non-functional harmonic style with frequent trills and triplets.

Figure 40 Opening bars of *Lan, Kula Inson, Lan*

These swift sections act as the connector between verses sung by the voice. An interesting feature of this short piece is the sung melody which is written using modes (centering around mixolydian mode). This is perhaps the most tonal melody in this entire collection. However, due to the nature of the materials used to write the collaborative piano parts (Pianos 1 and 2), which is non-functional harmony, this tonal melody is masked; making the listeners to be deceived to perceive this as non-tonal throughout *Lan, Kula Inson, Lan*. This is probably the abstract imagery of a fairy-tale the composer desired.

The musical score for Figure 41 features three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with the tempo marking '♩ = 100' and the instruction 'Effortlessly but forthrightly'. The lyrics are: 'Ka-yuh sam-pan, kayuh, Ka-yuh la-ju la-ju, A-dik ja-ngan ga-duh'. The middle staff is for Piano 1 (Pn. 1) and the bottom staff is for Piano 2 (Pn. 2). Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The piano accompaniment is non-tonal, using complex rhythmic patterns and trills to mask the modal melody of the voice.

Figure 41 Modal melody against non-tonal accompaniment

Ba, ba, Cak! (Ba, Ba, Cak!)

Table 9. Ba, ba, Cak! text and translation

Text in Malay	English translation
Ba, Ba, Cak! Cuba pandang, Bulan atas pucuk kayu ara, Apa kena abang tak pulang? Terkurung dalam bilik anak dara.	Ba, Ba, Cak! Try to see, The moon is at the tip of the fig tree, Why has my lover not come home? He is trapped in the maiden's room!
Apa kena bulan tak terang? Terlindung pokok kekabu, Apa kena abang tak pulang? Sudah terkurung dalam kelambu!	Why is the moon not bright? It is hidden by the cotton tree, Why has my lover not come home? He is trapped in the mosquito net!

Ba ba Cak! (1990) is the last song in this cycle. This song has a long introduction (around 100 bars), in which the main ideas and atmosphere are set in the music before the singer starts singing with a sense of resignation, as if trying to not show grief. The *pantun* tells about a wife waiting for her husband at home with hope despite knowing that he is with another woman. Though the text is cynical on the surface, Razak Abdul Aziz had composed the music to be in a confused, depressing ambience.

Razak Abdul Aziz stated that the motif used in this song is a nuance of the first song of this cycle, *Buai Adik*, indicating the finality of the work. However, *Ba ba Cak!* signifies the end of the cycle. This is done by returning to and reflecting on the sad woman at the beginning of this cycle. Perhaps the composer imagines this whole cycle to be a daydream of this woman trying to divert her sadness by reminiscing on past memories, only to return to the reality; realising her husband is never coming back.

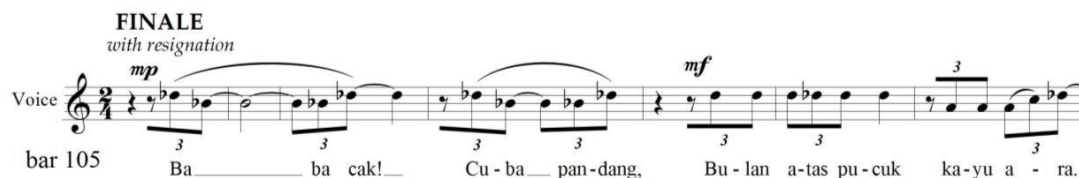


Figure 42 Motif from Ba ba Cak!



Figure 43 Motif from Buai Adik

Conclusion

The imageries behind each song in *10 Pantun Settings* are a reminiscence of Razak Abdul Aziz's memories in his earlier days. The narration of the cycle begins with a sad woman swaying her baby in a cradle at the open space of her house, possibly trying to stay strong for the child. She then starts to daydream into her past: remembering a cake-making scene, a make-believe game she possibly had, the duel between villages, her playful game with her husband, and other scenes in the cycle, before returning back to reality later at night; realising that she had been abandoned by her husband for another woman (though still hoping for him to return to her). With this narration, it is evident that the composer adapted the poems he chose from Ahmad Abdullah's *Nyanyian Kanak-Kanak* and narrated his own story. This is a clear trait of the tradition of art songs: composers adapting texts from various poets into their songs, usually in the form of a song-cycle, and later narrating a story throughout the cycle. This is exactly what Schubert did in *Winterreise*, Schumann in *Dichterliebe*, and Poulenc in *Les Bestiaire*, to name a few. This has potentially put Razak Abdul Aziz's *10 Pantun Settings* into the local and international halls of art songs, perhaps being one of the earliest in the national arena and at par with other great art songs in the entire body of the repertory.

Razak Abdul Aziz laments that, "...many Malaysians are very much interested in writing papers and dissertations on Western composers instead of writing on our own composers." (Abdul Aziz, personal interview, 2018). This signals a dire need for an intervention that gives emphasis to the local, multi-faceted music scene. It is good to note that in recent years, more local scholars and performers are starting to give attention to works by local composers. Nevertheless, compared to their Western counterparts, a lot of these local composers and their works have yet to be studied. It is hoped that the investigation of this paper would contribute towards future studies on works by Razak Abdul Aziz, who has been composing for nearly 40 years, only to gain attention from a very limited number of scholars and performers (Zamani et. al, p. 82). It is also hoped that the paper would assist in increasing the number of documentations on the distinct Malaysian music. It is time for works by Razak Abdul Aziz and other local composers to receive more attention from scholars and performers alike, as these local gems could potentially shape the identity of Malaysia's unique culture to be passed on to the upcoming, future generations.

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