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The Development of Ghazal Melayu Johor Music Composition from the 1950s Till Present

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Abstract

Since the emergence of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music (GMJ) pioneered by Pak Lomak around the 1920s until now, there has not been any comprehensive study ever conducted on the aspects of the creation or style of composition that has ever existed. Previous GMJ music studies focused on the historical and traditional characteristics of the music and did not investigate the creativity and innovation aspects which have been developed till now. As a result, no concepts of GMJ creation which has ever been used as references and guide in the world of music since it was born till now. The first objective of this study was to examine the influence of composition in the development of GMJ music from the context of inspiration/motivation of composition and socio-culture. Secondly, summarized the style of composition that has taken place in the development of GMJ music based on the era monopolized by well-known figures. This study used comparative methodology to summarize the development happened between traditional GMJ music to date. This study used a qualitative methodology of documents analysis for (written and audio/visual recording) *Ghazal Melayu Johor* and interviews with leaders and *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music activists. The implication for this study is to provide an overview and scholarly information to readers on the *Ghazal Melayu Johor* Music Composition since there are no research conducted previously.

Keywords: Ghazal Melayu Johor (GMJ), Traditional Music and Music Creation.

Introduction

The term *ghazal* is actually very familiar in the traditional world of art in which it is often associated with poetry and music originated from Arabian, Indian and Pakistani cultures. There are even names of *ghazal* composers who are well known globally such as Amer Khusrou, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Mehdi Hassan, Jagjit Singh, Ghulam Ali, and many more. The situation is not the same as Malay *ghazal*. There are still many who do not know its existence and the composers who are very successful in its development such as Pak Lomak, Ahmad Jusuh, Mokhtar Zam Zam, Kassim Taib, S. Baharom and many more. The development of GMJ's composition are worried to be deteriorating as many of GMJ's composition are not being highlighted especially the 'un-popular' compositions.

Low level of appreciation for traditional music in our country today has resulted in many Malaysian traditional music, not only Malay *ghazal*, are forgotten and received less opportunity and wide exposure. Therefore, the process of gaining knowledge of traditional arts in Malaysia happens slowly. The construction of a concept or theory mainly needs elements of meaning and phenomena that occur in society to be used as a source of knowledge. Fewer phenomena found in the area has made it more difficult to formulate a concept of art in any contexts including the creativity of its creation.

The word '*Ghazal*' comes from the Arabic language meaning to speak to women with the theme of love (Kanda, 1998, p. 4). *Ghazal* also means poetry of love. This poem is considered as one of the most popular types of poetry in Arab society since the age of Ignorance (Zaman, 1998, p. 143). *Ghazal* in Malaysia is divided into two: *Ghazal Melayu Johor* and *Ghazal Pati* in Kedah (Machfrida, 1998, p. 23). *Ghazal Melayu Johor* was more influenced by Hindustan while *Ghazal Pati Kedah* was more influenced by Arabic art. *Ghazal Melayu* which is synonymous with the art of southern was formerly comprised of Riau, Lingga and Singapore. The Johor government then was responsible in introducing *Ghazal* music to the respective provinces. However, the art of *Ghazal* was separately developed when there was power struggles between British and Dutch where British controlled Johor and Singapore while Dutch controlled Riau, Lingga and the whole of Sumatra.

Dato Bentara Luar Johor, Dato Mohamad Salleh Bin Perang was the person who first introduced the art of Persian *Ghazal* and Hindustani *Ghazal* to Malaya (Zaman, 1998, p. 145). During the time, *Ghazal* music was not yet formed like what we listen today. *Melayu Asli* Music was formed much earlier and became popular among royal musicians. Due to this, traditional Malay music was also experimented with musical instruments brought in from Persia and Hindustan such as Tabla, Harmonium, Sitar and Saranggi. Among the earliest traditional Malay song composed was *Jalak Lenteng*.

The grandson to Dato Bentara Luar, Pak Lomak, or his real name Haji Musa Bin Yusof, was the person responsible in the formation of *Ghazal* music through compositions and performances. He had limited *Ghazal* musical instruments to only seven instruments: Harmonium, Tabla, Gambus, Guitar, Violin, Tamborine, and Marakas. The form of *Ghazal* music is composed on its own to differentiate it *Melayu Asli* music. Elements of Hindustani music began to be absorbed into singing techniques and instrumental techniques until a new musical identity was composed at the time named *Ghazal Melayu*.

Recording Technology and Popular Songs of *Ghazal Melayu*

This study was also based on audio recordings in the 1960s and above because only at this time the new recording technology existed in Malaya. In other words, the *Ghazal* composition in the 1920s to 1950s were referred to the style of playing among *Ghazal* musicians in the 1960s and 70s. Thus, there might be differences in the characters of playing *Ghazal* due to different techniques of interpretation and expressions from musicians who were alive in the early days of *Ghazal's* existence.

In fact, many *ghazal* songs were composed without going through the process of gramophone recording. The songs were only played among the groups and only spread around the mukim or

districts by the active *ghazal* groups. All this happened due to the development of recording technology focusing only on cities such as Johor Bahru and Muar, as well as the attitudes of the Malay *ghazal* artists themselves who preferred to expose their works through live performances rather than music recording.

Based on this phenomenon, popular songs of Malay *ghazal* is referred to songs that went through the process of recording, widely spread through mass media and often played by many other groups of *Ghazal Melayu Johor*.

Inspiration of Composing Ghazal Melayu Johor Music

Inspiration also known as *inspirasi* in Malay word means “*sesuatu yg menggerakkan hati utk mencipta sesuatu (hasil seni dll)*” (Pustaka, 2017) or it can be interpreted as things that moves the heart to create something. Although it is synonymous with the term ‘inspiration’, the source that moves something is wider, while ‘ideas’ are initiated by God (Pustaka, 2017). Inspiration does not only happen in the creation of art alone, but it includes a process that takes place in all of human activities.

The composition of music will always be related to the aspects of creativity and philosophy. The creativity of modern artists is not equivalent to traditional artists because they have different philosophies of composition. The features of individualism are more evident in the composition of modern music, while in traditional music, the aspects of collectiveness and togetherness are more dominant in its work. Therefore, the philosophy of Malay Ghazal has always indicated the personality of old Malay artists who were very concern with the values of unity and togetherness in their compositions which sometimes are very difficult for us to identify real composers of certain *ghazal* songs.

Although the new Malay *ghazal* was only formed in the 1920s as a result of the development of *Nasib* songs (*Melayu Asli* songs), the features of the old Malay philosophy are still evident. Thus, as time goes on to subsequent years, these features had undergone significant changes as a result of modern aesthetic values.

Figures of Ghazal Melayu Johor Songs Composition

It is undeniable that there are many figures who have contributed in the development of GMJ music from the past to the present. The names of prominent songwriters of Malay *ghazal* in the 1920s were dominated by Pak Lomak as the person responsible in developing Malay *ghazal* music and spreading it to all the colonies in Johor state including Riau and Lingga. Starting from 1950s onwards, more *ghazal* songwriters were born.



Figure 1 Pak Lomak as the Father of *Ghazal Melayu Johor*

To facilitate this study, several prominent figures were grouped according to the popularity level of their works often played in recordings and performances. This grouping started from the 1950s until recent as illustrated in the figure below:

No	Names of Ghazal Melayu Johor Songs Composer (Popular)	Year
1.	Pak Lomak	1920 till 1940s
2.	S. Baharom	1950s
3.	Mokhtar Zam Zam	1960s
4.	Ahmad Jusuh	1970s
5.	Mohd Noh Said	1980s
6.	Idris Mohamed	1990s
7.	-	2000 - 2010
8.	Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim	2010 - 2020

Figure 2 Names of *Ghazal* songs composers according to the year

The figure above is as one of the models used to examine the composition of *ghazal* music happened in every decade. These prominent figures are samples or reference to the development of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music composition rarely known to the public. S. Baharom, Mokhtar Zam Zam, Ahmad Jusuh, Mohd Noh Said and Idris Mohamed are the prominent figures who supported the struggles of Pak Lomak's in the creativity of *ghazal* music composition. They have their own style songs compositions.

Nevertheless, getting the input about the prominent figures who have composed *ghazal* songs for the year 2000 until current is very difficult. This is due to the fact that the recordings of current *ghazal* songs are merely repetition of performances from the old songs. Except in 2015 in which a group called *GhaMuhyi*, was formed by the author himself (Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim) who was then performing and recording *Ghazal Melayu Johor* songs with a new style or contemporary.

Popular Songs of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* starting from 1950 until present

The year 1950s was chosen as the starter in this study because the years marked the beginning of the development of the *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music very rapidly then it was followed in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. These three decades are very significant to the development of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music as the benchmark for creative compositions produced. In addition, it is also as a measure of the popularity songs composed based on the frequency of recordings made by many *ghazal* groups.

The element of popularity in this context is based on the number of recordings available in the form of gramophone record, cassettes and CDs. Each *ghazal* group who went through the process of recording would be playing similar repertoire in their album recording. It is unconfirmed of the basis for doing that, however, the songwriters admitted that there was an element of popularity in the selection of songs recorded for promotional and marketing purposes. The writer has set three main methods in selecting suitable songs to be used as research materials for this study: (1) the songs were often recorded many times by different *ghazal* groups, (2) the songs had unique musical characters; and (3) the songs were composed by famous songs composers of the time.

No	Title	Composer	Singer	Group	Year of Recording
1	Bukit Terih	S Baharom Pengail	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal J. B	1980s
2	Gunung Soga	Salleh Suradi	Ayob Hj Khdzir	Jalan Dewan Pontian Ghazal	1980s
3	Pucuk Palas	Awang @ Ismail Jusoh	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal J.B	1970s
4	Puteri Menangis	Yusof Akil	Ramlah Rahim	Ros Tebrau Ghazal J. Bahru	1980s
5	Seruling Buloh	Johar dari Kg Bahru Jemaah Ghazal Johor Bharu	Adek Esah	Sri Penambang Ghazal Muar	1960s
6	Sri Pati	Johar	Jaafar Ismail	Kg Bahru Jemaah Ghazal Johor Bharu	1960s
7	Sri Skudai	Kassim Taib dari Sri Timbalan Ghazal Johor Bharu	SA Aishah	Sri Melati Ghazal J. B	1970s
8	Nasib Pengail	S Baharom Pengail/ Ahmad Keling	Ramlah Adon	Sri Penambang Ghazal Muar	1960s
9	Lancang Daik	S Baharom Pengail/ Ahmad Keling	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal J. B	1980s

Figure 3 Findings of *ghazal* songs in the 1950s

Figure 3 above shows the findings of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* songs composition around the year of 1950s. Around this year, *ghazal* music was one of the popular folk music that spread throughout the state of Johor. All earliest songs recorded were in the 1960s Based on the recording, Mr. S. Baharom Pengail was the most popular *ghazal* songs composition in the 1950s. He had composed

three songs which had become the phenomenon and the most popular among *ghazal* musicians, namely Bukit Terih, Nasib Pengail and Lancang Daik.

The similarities in terms of musical in all the songs mentioned above are in the aspects of the form or structure of the songs themselves. The two-part form or so-called binary form is synonymous with traditional *ghazal* music and that is clearly seen in the songs above. The difference is the way the song is played or the improvisational element based on the virtuosity of the musicians.

No	Title	Composer	Singer	Group	Years of the recordings
1	Ampangan Kelang	Mokhtar Zam Zam	Ungku Ketty	Shah Utama Ghazal Johor Bharu	1960s
2	Bukit Kesenangan	Mokhtar Zam Zam	A. Samad Bin Katin	Shah Utama Ghazal Johor Bharu	1960s
3	Bukit Melati	Mokhtar Zam Zam dari Shah Utama Ghazal Johor Bharu	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal J. Bahru	1970s
4	Bunga Raya	Mokhtar Zam Zam	Mohd Amin Bin Mohd	Shah Utama Ghazal Johor Bharu	1960s
5	Che Siti	Atan Buntal	SA Aishah	Sri Penambang Ghazal Muar	1960s
6	Dodoi Anak	Ahmad Jusoh	Ahmad Jusoh	Sri Penambang Ghazal Muar	1960's
7	Kasih Menumpang	A Wahid Aziz (Lang Sewah Ghazal Kota Tinggi)	Maimunah	Sri Melati Ghazal J. Bahru	1970s
8	Kasih Terpendam	Atan Buntal	Rosiah Chik	Sri Penambang Ghazal Muar	1960s
9	Kuala Endau	Mokhtar Zam Zam	Mokhtar Zam Zam	Shah Utama Ghazal Johor Bharu	1960s
10	Kuala Skudai	Jaafar Ali	Jaafar Ali	Setia Jaya Ghazal Tampoi	1960s
11	Laksamana Bentan	Kassim Taib dari Sri Timbalan Ghazal Johor Bharu	SA Aishah	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bahru	1970s
12	Mak Ngah Tersenyum	Atan Buntal dari Sri	Rosiah Chik	Orkes Ghazal Fadzil Ahmad	1990s

		Penambang Ghazal Muar			
13	Memendam Rasa	Atan Buntal/ Penambang (Sri Penambang Muar)	Rosiah Chik	Sri Pelangi Ghazal Muar	1970s
14	Mendung Petang	Atan Buntal/ Penambang	Maimunah	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bahru	1970s
15	Nasib Jeragan	Atan Buntal	Awang Bakar	Sri Penambang	1960s
16	Nasib Stulang	Kassim Taib	Aisah Ahmad	Sri Timbalan Ghazal J. Bahru	1960s
17	Pembukaan Lang Sewah – Mendung Pagi	A Wahid Aziz	Rosiah Chik	Lang Sewah Ghazal Kota Tinggi	1960s
18	Sri Puleh	Atan Buntal/ Penambang	Rosiah Chik	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1980s
19	Telok Mahkota/ Istana Kayangan	Atan Buntal/ Penambang	Rosiah Chik	Sri Penambang	1960s
20	Tasik Utara	Mokhtar Zam Zam	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal J. Bahru	1970s

Figure 4 Findings of ghazal songs in the 1960s

Figure 4 above shows an increase in the number of compositions of *ghazal* songs commonly recorded by *ghazal* groups. In this era, big names emerged that are actively composing new songs which were widely accepted by many groups, namely Mokhtar Zam Zam, Atan Butal, Ahmad Jusuh, Kassim Taib, A. Wahid Aziz and Jaafar Ali. Based on the lists, the works of Mokhtar Zam Zam are most recorded and played. One of his most popular songs played among *ghazal* musicians is *Bukit Kesenangan*.

No.	Title	Composer	Singer	Group	Year of recording
1	Bayangan Pelangi	Ahmad Jusoh	Zarina Daim	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1980s
2	Bukit Piatu	Ahmad Jusoh	S Fauziah	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1970s
3	Bukit Putera	Ahmad Jusoh	Rosiah Chik	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1980s
4	Delima Manis	Ahmad Jusoh	S Fauziah	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1970s
5	Dendang Kayangan	Atan Ahmad	Orkid Abdullah	Sri Kenangan Ghazal Batu Pahat	1980s
6	Godaan Rindu	A Wahid Aziz	Maimunah Mohd	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s
7	Jiwa Terpendam	Bachik Daiman	Hafsah Ahmad	Sri Kukup Pontian	1970s
8	Kuala Kesang	Ali Mohd	Rosiah Chik	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1980s
9	Nasib Penambang	Mohd Noh Said	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s
10	Pulau Kukup	Ahli Sri Kukup Ghazal Pontian	Hafsah Ahmad	Sri Kukup Pontian	1970s
11	Puteri Bintang Timur	A Wahid Aziz	Maimunah	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s
12	Selendang Bali	Ahmad Jusoh	Ahmad Jusoh	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1970s
13	Seri Melati	A Wahid Aziz	Maimunah	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s
14	Sri Pelangi	Ahmad Jusoh	Ramlah Adon	Sri Maharani Ghazal Muar	1970s
15	Tangisan Hati	A Wahid Aziz	Aisah Wahid	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s
16	Tanjong Penyabong	Atan Ahmmad	M Rosila	Sri Kenangan Ghazal Batu Pahat	1970s

17	Tanjung Serindit	Maziah Md Shah	Maziah Md Shah	Kumpulan Bukit Hampar Ghazal Segamat	1970s
18	Tasik Embon	Mohd Noh Said	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s
19	Intan Baiduri	A Wahid	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1970s

Figure 5 Findings of *ghazal* songs in the 1970s

Figure 5 shows that the composition of *ghazal* songs has been recorded more and more. This marked as a benchmark for the golden age of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music. Many composers appeared at that time such as Ahmad Jusoh, Atan Ahmad, A Wahid Aziz, Bachik Daiman, Mohd Noh Said and Maziah Md Shah. Among them, Ahmad Jusoh was considered one of the well-known figures not only in the composition of *ghazal* music but also with his courage to do some innovation on *ghazal* music such as combining it with modern Western music such as jazz. His courageous nature had made many *ghazal* artists call him 'Pak Godak'. 'Godak' can be connoted as the behavior of people who like to mix things up.

No	Title	Composer	Singer	Group	Year of Recording
1	Bandaraya Bersejarah	Kumpulan Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
2	Bukit Pedoman	Kumpulan Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	Ramlah Rahim	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
3	Bumi Bertuah	Kumpulan Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
4	Derita Hati	Mohd Noh Said	Kamariah Mohd	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
5	Istana Pelangi	Bachik Daiman	Zarina Daim	Sri Saujana Muar	1980s
6	Kuala Danga	A Wahid Aziz	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
7	Mustika Rose	Kumpulan Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
8	Nasib Si Buta	Sri Bahagia Ghazal Pontian	Zainab Mohd	Kumpulan Sri Bahagia Ghazal Pontian	1980s
9	Nilam Delima	Zainal Talib	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
10	Pusaka Melayu	Mohd Noh Said	M Karim	Sri Melati Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
11	Ratapan Hati	Kumpulan Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
12	Teluk Cempedak	A Wahid Aziz	SA Aishah	Ros Tebrau Ghazal Johor Bharu	1980s
13	Madu Hati	Atan Ahmad	Orkid Abdullah	Sri Kenangan Ghazal Batu Pahat	1980s

Figure 6 Findings of *ghazal* songs in the 1980s

Figure 6 above shows a slight decrease in the new songs recording activities of *Ghazal Melayu Johor*. Although there are new names in the composition of *ghazal* songs such as Mohd Noh Said, A. Wahid Aziz, Zainal Talib and Atan Ahmad, the number of new songs is very difficult to identify. Thus, songs written by Mohd Noh as the leader for *Seri Melati Ghazal* from Johor Bahru were among the songs played frequently until now such as *Derita Hati* and *Pusaka Melayu*.

No	Title	Composer	Singer	Group	Year of Recording
1	Mega Sari	Abu Shah Dolah	Subari Palil	Sri Pelangi	1990s
2	Bukit Kepong	Idris Mohamed	Abdul Rahman	Yayasan Warisan Johor	1990s

Figure 7 Findings of *ghazal* songs in the 1990s

Figure 7 above shows that the recording activities for *ghazal* were no longer focused on newly composed songs, but more on repetition of recordings on old *ghazal* songs. There were only two songs said to be popular among *ghazal* artists, which is *Mega Sari* composed by Abu Shah Dolah and *Bukit Kepong* composed by Idris Mohamed. *Bukit Kepong* was the most popular song at that time in which new *ghazal* songs with the theme of patriotism were often accepted in recordings and official performances by *Yayasan Warisan Johor*. Idris Mohamed was a respected figure as well as the Music Director, Music Performance Division, Johor Heritage Foundation. He contributed a lot to the development of *ghazal* music and one of the most important contributions was to organize a performance program entitled 'Ghazal Concert' in 2000.

The study also discovered that no findings were revealed for newly composed songs between the years 2000 to 2010. The compositions of new songs for *Ghazal Melayu Johor* were put on hold over a decade and recording activities and performances were focused entirely on the repetition of old songs. This fact gave an impression that in this decade, *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music received less attention among local communities. As a result, this music only lived by the repetition of old songs.

No	Title	Composer	Singer	Group	Year of Recording
1	Matahari	Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim	Rojer dan Zuraidah	GhaMuhyi	2014
2	Telunjuk Silir Sirat	Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim	Asmidar	GhaMuhyi	2014
3	Seri Langit	Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim	Azizul Haqim	GhaMuhyi	2014
4	Bunga	Kamarulzaman Mohamed Karim	Nil (Instrumental)	GhaMuhyi	2014

Figure 8 Findings of *ghazal* songs in 2010 until present

Figure 8 shows the activities of composing new *ghazal* songs started again. Unfortunately, only one group dominated this activity, which was *GhaMuhyi*, led by the author himself and established in 2014. *GhaMuhyi* is a group which combines many active young traditional music activists in the Klang Valley with a fresh and intricate new musical expression.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The results revealed that the effect of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* song compositions were more likely to use the inspiration based on themes of the universe and humanity. This is especially evident in the lyrics used originated from the structure of a poem which consists of the 'hint' part expressed on themes of the universe and the 'meaning' part expressed on themes of humanity. Secondly, the composition of elements other than the lyrics are more inspired by the binary form also affected by the form of Malay poems.

In addition, the style of *Ghazal Melayu Johor* music composition did not show many significant changes. The traditional idioms introduced by Pak Lomak were followed by the next GMJ music composers. However, starting from 2014, GMJ's music composition styles have undergone a drastic change with the formation of the *ghazal* group *GhaMuhyi*. The group has successfully contributed several new repertoires which give new path to GMJ's traditional music idioms that are rarely developed in music compositions. In addition, this group has also succeeded in creating new idioms combined with GMJ traditional music idioms to create a new style.

Based on the whole study as well, it was discovered that the development of GMJ music composition has deteriorated because no composition of new songs since 1990s. Activists were more interested in playing existing works, especially popular GMJ songs such as *Seri Mersing*, *Pak Ngah Balik* and *Penawar Rindu*. This reality is very worrying if it continues for a longer period of time. Interests and the composition abilities have also begun to decrease among young GMJ music activists.

Efforts to increase the collection of GMJ music works need to be continued. The government, through its official broadcasting bodies such as RTM and Radio Klasik FM, needs to be more active in highlighting programs that encourage the composition of traditional music such as GMJ and not just focusing on performances and competitions which only use traditional repertoire. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) need to be more courageous in organizing programs that can develop awareness of artistic creativity among the community, especially on this traditional art.

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