

Legend of Ngarai Sianok: Interpreting the Legend of Ngarai Sianok through Program Music in a Post-Rock Composition

Syahrul Al Basyir Putra, Fahmi Marh

Institut Seni Indonesia Padangpanjang, Padang Panjang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Ngarai Sianok is a steep valley located on the border of Bukittinggi, IV Koto District, Agam Regency, West Sumatra, renowned for its legend that tells the conflict between Sang Sapurba and Katik Muno, two figures symbolizing greed and arrogance, ultimately leading to destruction. This legend contains profound values and serves as an interesting subject for interpretation through musical composition, aiming to depict the impact of negative human traits on societal harmony. This study seeks to interpret this legend through music. The method used in the creation of this work consists of four main stages: preparation, elaboration, synthesis, and conceptual realization. This approach involves in-depth musical exploration and creative expression through a composition based on the Post-rock genre, known for its atmospheric strength and intense of emotional expression. The composition is structured into three main sections representing the progression of the story: Emptiness. The result of this study is a musical composition that not only adapts traditional Minangkabau elements but also incorporates contemporary techniques within the Post-rock genre to create an ambiance that illustrates the contrast between harmony and destruction. Through the use of diverse instruments, this work seeks to convey the essence of the legend to the audience, providing a deeper understanding of the moral message regarding the consequences of human greed and arrogance. In conclusion, this composition does not merely narrate a legendary tale but also invites listeners to reflect on social and humanitarian values relevant to contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Legend, Ngarai Sianok, Interpretation, Program Music, Post-Rock.

Corresponding author

Name: Syahrul Al Basyir Putra

Email: albasyirsyahrul@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Ngarai Sianok is a steep valley located on the border of Bukittinggi City, in IV Koto District, Agam Regency, West Sumatra. In American English, this type of valley is referred to as a "canyon," while in Spanish, it is known as "cañón." A canyon is a deep valley with steep sides, formed by river erosion, creating a dramatic and majestic natural landscape (Doe, 2020). Based on geological studies, Ngarai Sianok was formed from pyroclastic deposits of Mount Marapi and Mount Singgalang, which accumulated over thousands of years. These deposits gradually formed and later experienced faulting, resulting in the steep topography and deep valley observed today (Smith & Johnson, 2019). The Semangko Fault in Ngarai Sianok functions as a recharge area, allowing rainwater to infiltrate and be stored in the underlying aquifer layers. As a result,

groundwater drilling in this area does not yield significant amounts of water since the infiltrated water flows into deeper aquifer layers (Hidayat & Firdaus, 2018).

Historically, Ngarai Sianok was known as *karbouwengat* or *kerbau sanget*, referring to the abundance of wild buffalo that roamed freely at the valley floor. Along the Batang Sianok River, various medicinal plants and fauna such as long-tailed macaques, siamangs, leaf monkeys (*simpai*), and wild boars can be found. This biodiversity indicates that Ngarai Sianok is not only a geological landscape but also a rich ecosystem with ecological and cultural significance (Ibrahim, 2017).

The legend of Ngarai Sianok is recorded in *Tambo Alam Minangkabau*, which tells the story of the arrival of a great leader named Sang Sapurba or Sultan Maharaja Diradja in the prosperous land of Minangkabau. Sang Sapurba is depicted as a wise and just ruler, a direct descendant of Alexander the Great (Iskandar Zulkarnaini Yang Agung), who ruled the Macedonian Empire in the land of Ruhum. With the ambition to expand his kingdom, Sultan Maharaja Diradja left Macedonia and sailed until he reached the island of Andalas (Muchtar, 2019). This legend illustrates the contrast between harmony and destruction, arrogance and humility, as well as greed leading to downfall. The story serves as a reflection of the social and cultural values upheld by the Minangkabau people, particularly in maintaining the balance of nature and life. According to the philosophy of nature The Minangkabau people believe that the balance of nature reflects the harmony of their social and spiritual life (Putra, 2022). This composition interprets the legend of Ngarai Sianok through Program Music, utilizing a Post-rock approach. Program Music is an instrumental genre specifically composed to convey extramusical ideas through narrative and descriptive composition (Kamien, 2008). This musical form is highly suitable for depicting the emotional atmosphere and storyline of the Ngarai Sianok legend.

The term Post-rock was first introduced by music critic Simon Reynolds in 1994 in his review of the album *Hex* by Bark Psychosis. Reynolds defined Post-rock as "using rock instrumentation for non-rock purposes, treating guitars as facilitators of timbre and texture rather than as a source of riffs and power chords." The Post-rock approach allows freedom in exploring sound textures and atmospheres through the use of electric guitars, sound effects, and experimental electronic elements. Post-rock focuses more on ambiance and atmosphere rather than explicit melodies or lyrics, allowing listeners to personally interpret the emotional experience (Fletcher, 2011).

In this composition, the narrative of the legend is constructed using Narratology Theory as proposed by Gérard Genette. Narratology is the study of narrative structure, involving elements such as storyline, characters, narrative perspective, and themes. By applying narratology, the interpretation of the legend is not only seen as folklore but also as a cultural narrative that embodies the social and spiritual values of the Minangkabau people (Prince, 1982). The aim of this composition is not only to retell the legend but also to convey moral messages relevant to modern life. Furthermore, this work seeks to introduce the richness of Minangkabau culture through an innovative modern musical medium, bridging tradition with contemporary musical expression.

This composition is significant as it contributes to the development of Program Music as a narrative medium in the context of cultural legends. Additionally, it opens opportunities for further exploration in the Post-rock genre as an experimental musical

approach that integrates local traditions with global aesthetics. Thus, this study not only reflects the cultural identity of the Minangkabau people but also enriches the landscape of contemporary music on a universal scale.

METHOD

The method in the process of creating an artwork is essential, as it demonstrates how an artist's ideas are realized into a work of art. The creative method encompasses the entire process, from searching for the subject of creation, determining the artistic object, exploring theoretical foundations or empirical experiences, experimenting with techniques and materials, to producing the final artwork.

1. Idea and Inspiration Gathering

The creation of this work was carried out through an in-depth observational approach, literature studies, and exploration of various relevant musical references. The process of generating ideas involved a comprehensive understanding of music theory concepts and musical styles related to the chosen theme. The primary inspiration for this work comes from the post-rock genre, known for its expansive and emotional instrumental atmosphere, as well as program music theory, which emphasizes structured narrative and musical progression.

The central theme of this work is "transformation," serving as the guiding thread in an emotional journey moving from an overwhelming void toward a search and, ultimately, the attainment of hope and renewal. This work portrays how emotional shifts can be reflected through dynamic musical compositions, utilizing diverse elements of harmony, rhythm, and sound textures.

2. Sound Exploration

The approach in creating this composition involved a series of in-depth experiments with various instruments, playing techniques, and sound effects to generate deep nuances and atmospheres. The instruments used include electric guitar, piano, and various electronic instruments, each playing a specific role in shaping the sound textures that support the narrative flow of the music. The electric guitar was used to create expansive and captivating sound layers, while the piano provided introspective and melodic harmonic elements. Meanwhile, electronic instruments were employed to generate a more abstract and futuristic atmosphere.

Experiments with sound effects also played a crucial role in crafting the distinctive, reflective post-rock ambiance. Effects such as reverb, delay, and looping were carefully utilized to extend sounds, create resonant spaces, and build layered textures, ultimately forming a deep atmosphere and evoking a vast emotional space. Reverb and delay, in particular, were used to introduce a sense of temporal depth, while looping techniques allowed for the repetition of certain motifs, inviting listeners to contemplate and immerse themselves in the gradual unfolding of musical changes.

Additionally, volume dynamics were explicitly used to emphasize emotional shifts in the musical narrative. Techniques such as crescendo and diminuendo were applied to symbolize the emotional journey depicted in the composition. Crescendo, representing struggle or tension, was used to highlight intense climactic moments, while variations in volume dynamics reflected changes in emotions ranging from tranquil anticipation to explosive climaxes that signify peak realization or enlightenment. In this

way, volume dynamics function as a key element in illustrating the emotional transformation at the heart of this composition.

3. Composition and Improvisation

The creative process began with the development of musical sketches in the form of motifs or chord progressions designed to represent specific themes within the musical narrative. These musical sketches served as an initial foundation, providing a framework for the emotional atmosphere intended to be conveyed. To enrich these foundational ideas, improvisation played an integral role in the creative process, allowing the composer to explore and discover new possibilities in structuring the music.

This improvisational technique not only expanded the musical horizon but also helped in identifying appropriate dynamics and developmental patterns that could reflect the emotional journey intended in the composition. This approach provided the expressive freedom necessary to shape an emotional arc that evolves from tension to resolution.

This composition is organized into three main sections, each reflecting an emotional stage that forms the core of the narrative.

The first section, Emptiness, is portrayed through introverted and minimalist musical elements. In this part, the use of empty space and simplicity in harmonic structure and rhythm creates an atmosphere of silence and void, representing a state of emotional emptiness and isolation.

The second section, Struggle, is characterized by more intense and complex dynamics, incorporating tempo changes, harmonic dissonance, and fragmented rhythmic patterns to depict tension and the arduous effort to overcome conflict. This section is rich in contrast and dynamism, illustrating the internal struggle experienced by the characters in the story.

The final section, Hope, presents a significant shift, featuring uplifting melodies and fuller harmonies, creating an atmosphere of optimism and enlightenment. Here, melodic and harmonic development leads to a musical climax that conveys a sense of resolution and tranquility, aligning with the theme of hope. The arrangement becomes richer, employing major chords and more open melodies, guiding listeners through an emotional journey that ultimately concludes with peace and fulfillment.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

The composition "*Legenda of Ngarai Sianok*" interprets the legend of Ngarai Sianok through Program Music, utilizing a Post-rock approach. This work consists of three main sections, each representing the emotional flow and narrative of the story: *Sasuai*, *Bancano*, and Prosperity Again. Each section is designed to depict the dynamics of harmony, conflict, and resolution within Minangkabau society using symbolic and atmospheric musical elements.

First Section: "*Sasuai*" (Harmony)

The first section, titled "*Sasuai*", derives from the Minangkabau word meaning "in accord" or "harmony." This section illustrates the alignment between the community and their customs, fostering harmony in Minangkabau socio-cultural life.

The music is dominated by melodic instruments such as strings and traditional Minangkabau vocals, creating a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere.

Musical Analysis and Symbolism

This section integrates traditional Minangkabau wind instruments, chosen to symbolize local wisdom and peace within the musical narrative. Traditional wind instruments, such as the *serunai* and *suling*, hold a significant role in Minangkabau culture, especially in meaningful ceremonial events where these instruments accompany rituals aimed at maintaining balance and harmony between humans and nature. In this context, wind instruments are selected not only for their soft and melodious sound but also for their strong symbolic value, representing peace, alignment, and harmony fundamental principles of Minangkabau life. Through this instrumental choice, the composition seeks to convey a profound cultural message, depicting a harmonious and respectful relationship between humans and nature.

The melody in this section follows a simple yet expressive structure, utilizing the Minangkabau pentatonic scale, which is deeply rooted in the musical traditions of agrarian communities. The pentatonic scale, known for its minimalist character, reflects the Minangkabau people's philosophy of valuing simplicity and balance in all aspects of life. The melodies derived from this scale not only possess sonic beauty but also embody local values of living in harmony with nature, portraying a way of life that is simple yet meaningful and peaceful. The use of traditional Minangkabau instruments in this composition not only enhances the cultural essence but also adds depth to the narrative dimension of the story being conveyed. The presence of these instruments represents the arrival of Sang Sapurba as a wise leader who brings peace and prosperity to his people. In Minangkabau culture, Sang Sapurba is known as a legendary figure with the ability to unite different groups and maintain harmony within society. Thus, traditional wind instruments not only enrich the musical texture but also deepen the portrayal of Sang Sapurba character and his crucial role as a symbol of peace and wisdom within the overarching narrative.



1st Picture

Traditional woodwind instrumental of Minangkabau, Bansi and Brass Instrument
French Horn
Documented by: Badu

This section represents the harmony between nature and society, which is the core philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* in Minangkabau culture (Navis, 1984). The presence of Sang Sapurba is interpreted as a symbol of just and wise leadership capable of maintaining social and environmental balance.

Second Section: "Bancano" (Disaster)

The second section of this composition is titled "*Bancano*", a Minangkabau word meaning "disaster" or "destruction." This title was chosen to reflect the essence of the narrative in this section, where the theme of destruction caused by human greed and arrogance takes center stage in the musical depiction. In the context of Minangkabau legends, particularly the legend of Ngarai Sianok, the disaster is represented by the figure of Katik Muno, a character who seeks to seize power through illegitimate means. Through his unrestrained ambition, Katik Muno embodies the human tendency toward greed, which ultimately leads to destruction and conflict within society.

In "*Bancano*", the musical composition is designed to create an atmosphere of tension and dissonance, illustrating the chaos brought about by these negative traits. Fast dynamics and fragmented rhythms are used to enhance the sense of instability and growing devastation. Dissonant harmonies and sudden tempo changes emphasize feelings of uncertainty and destruction that plague society when power and personal ambition override collective harmony. Through drastic shifts in musical structure, this section conveys a sense of anxiety, suffering, and division resulting from human actions that disrupt the balance of nature and social order.



2nd Picture

Combo Band Section

Documented by: Rizki Wahyudi



3rd Picture

Woodwind Instrument section, Alto Saxophone and Tenor Saxophone
(Documented by: Rizki Wahyudi)



4th Picture

Brass Instrument, Trumpet and Trombone
Documented by: Badu

Moreover, the use of harsher and more contrasting instruments, both in terms of texture and expression, deepens the depiction of the disaster. The incorporation of sharper, more intense percussion, along with tense chords, helps to illustrate the rising tension and moments of crisis. In this sense, "*Bancano*" serves not only as a part of the musical narrative but also as a warning against the dangers of human greed and arrogance, which can disrupt harmony and lead to disaster.

Through this portrayal, the composition seeks to draw parallels between the legend of Ngarai Sianok and broader social and political conditions, where the desire for power can lead to destruction if not balanced with wisdom and responsibility. Thus, "*Bancano*" functions not only as a representation of events within the legend but also as a moral message relevant to human life in general, cautioning against the consequences of actions driven by excessive greed and ambition.

Musical Analysis and Emotional Dynamics

This section adopts a mixed ensemble consisting of a combination of modern and traditional instruments, including a combo band, woodwind and brass instruments, as well as traditional Minangkabau wind instruments. This diverse instrumental combination not only enriches the musical texture but also creates contrasting emotional dynamics, illustrating the transition between harmony and destruction. Through this arrangement, the composition aims to depict the duality inherent in the story, where an established harmony is ultimately shattered by ambition and greed. The woodwinds provide a soft and melancholic tone that reflects the initial harmony, while the more powerful and bold brass instruments, in synergy with traditional wind instruments, introduce a more aggressive element, leading to division and conflict.

The sense of disaster in this section is reinforced by ambient sounds created through electric guitar and keyboard. The use of distortion and echo effects on these instruments is intended to produce rough and fragmented sounds, symbolizing the chaos and destruction resulting from unrestrained greed and ambition. This distortion adapts the characteristic approach of the Post-rock genre, which often employs layers of atmospheric sounds to build deep emotional tension. Sound layering techniques using effects such as reverb and delay create a vast, resonant space, intensifying the feeling of chaos and uncertainty within the story.

In terms of sound texture, gradual dynamic techniques such as crescendo are effectively used to depict the rising intensity of conflict and tension in the narrative. This escalation process is designed to immerse the listener in a continuously intensifying tension, reflecting how the situation grows increasingly volatile toward its climax. Meanwhile, the use of staccato techniques in brass instruments adds a sharp and aggressive tone, evoking feelings of violence and high tension. This is particularly relevant to the character of Katik Muno, who, in the legend, is portrayed as an arrogant figure driven by an overwhelming ambition to seize power. The rigid and fragmented staccato passages reinforce these negative characteristics, effectively portraying an uncontrollable drive for destruction.

Overall, this section combines contrasting musical elements to create a powerful depiction of destruction caused by ambition and greed. The compositional approach aims to provide an intense and emotionally charged listening experience, highlighting the crucial role of music in shaping and deepening the story's narrative, especially in illustrating the darker aspects of Katik Muno's character and the catastrophe he brings about.



5th Picture

Staccato technic in Woodwind and Brass Instrument Section

Transcribed: Syahrul Al Basyir Putra

This section reflects the internal and external conflicts caused by greed and arrogance, which, in Minangkabau philosophy, are considered sources of disaster and social destruction. These conflicts are depicted through the clash between musical harmony and dissonance, metaphorically representing social fragmentation due to the pursuit of power.

Third Section: “Prosperity Again”

The third section, titled “Prosperity Again”, illustrates Katik Muno’s remorse and the restoration of harmony in Minangkabau society following his defeat by Sang Sapurba. This section represents renewal, revival, and prosperity after destruction.

Musical Analysis and Emotional Atmosphere

Ambience and Atmosphere: This section utilizes ambient textures from the keyboard to create a calm and reflective mood, symbolizing remorse and contemplation. **Use of Strings and Woodwinds:** String instruments are blended with traditional woodwinds to produce a soft harmony, representing recovery and peace.

Harmonic Development: The musical structure gradually shifts from minor to major, symbolizing a transformation from sorrow to hope. This technique aligns with Post-rock conventions, which employ gradual harmonic progression to evoke emotional catharsis.



6th Picture

The Development of Harmony from Minor to Major in the Woodwind and Brass Instrument Score

Transcribed: Syahrul Al Basyir Putra

This section represents the transformation of Katik Muno's character from greed to remorse and moral awareness, aligning with the *petatah-petitih* (proverbial wisdom) of Minangkabau, which emphasizes the importance of introspection and self-restraint. The clear river flowing through Ngarai Sianok, which was once depicted as a stream of fire, is interpreted as a symbol of purification and spiritual renewal.

Through this composition, *Legenda of Ngarai Sianok* successfully interprets harmony and destruction within Minangkabau society through Program Music, crafted in the Post-rock style. The musical narrative is built through the exploration of sound textures, emotional dynamics, and harmonic compositions that reflect the transformation from harmony to conflict and eventual restoration. This approach not only retells the story but also creates a profound and reflective emotional experience for the audience.

DISCUSSION

The composition *Legenda of Ngarai Sianok* successfully translates the legend of Ngarai Sianok into an artistic musical narrative using the Post-rock and Program Music approach. Each section "*Sasuai*" (Harmony), "*Bancano*" (Disaster), and Prosperity Again illustrates different emotional and philosophical aspects of the story, reflecting the Minangkabau people's perspective on harmony, destruction, and renewal. The use of traditional Minangkabau instruments, alongside modern elements like electric guitars and synthesizers, enhances the cultural depth of the composition. These findings emphasize that musical interpretation can serve as a medium for storytelling and moral reflection, making cultural narratives more accessible to contemporary audiences.

This study aligns with previous research on Program Music, particularly Kamien (2008), who describes how instrumental compositions can effectively convey extramusical ideas. The structure of this work also reflects principles from narratology, as discussed by Prince (1982), wherein a musical narrative follows a clear trajectory of conflict and resolution. Furthermore, the incorporation of Post-rock elements, as described by Reynolds (1994), reinforces the genre's characteristic of using atmosphere and texture to evoke deep emotional responses. Compared to previous Minangkabau musical interpretations, this study expands the horizon of local storytelling by integrating traditional elements with experimental soundscapes, enriching both ethnomusicological and contemporary musical discourse.

Despite its innovative approach, this study has certain limitations. First, the interpretation of the legend through music remains subjective, as listener perception varies based on cultural and musical background. Second, the reliance on Post-rock as a genre might limit accessibility for audiences unfamiliar with its atmospheric and experimental nature. Additionally, the integration of traditional and modern instruments poses technical challenges in live performance settings, requiring careful balancing to ensure coherence in sound production.

This study opens new avenues for future research in cultural music interpretation, particularly in integrating traditional storytelling with contemporary music genres. Further studies could explore audience reception and emotional responses to this composition through empirical analysis. Additionally, similar approaches could be applied to other folklore traditions, expanding the role of music as

a bridge between historical narratives and modern artistic expressions. In practical terms, this composition could serve as an educational tool in music and cultural studies, providing an innovative method for preserving and promoting indigenous narratives in the global creative industry.

CONCLUSION

Through Legenda of Ngarai Sianok, the Musik Programa approach combined with the Post-rock genre successfully interprets the beauty and deep meaning of the Ngarai Sianok legend. The musical narrative is constructed through the exploration of sound textures, emotional dynamics, and compositional structures that reflect a journey from the depths of the canyon to the peak of hope. Distinctive Post-rock elements, such as atmospheric guitar effects and gradually evolving harmonic progressions, bring a new dimension to this legend, making it not just a retold story but an immersive and felt experience. These elements enhance the performance, making it more vivid and engaging for the audience.

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